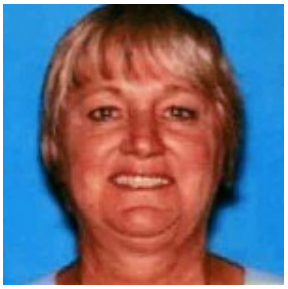
S. Tahoe shooting victim – compassionate, outgoing, giving

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

A while back, Florence Donovan-Gunderson dropped by Scott Shehadi's business with a gift – two hats she knitted to keep his sons warm during the Tahoe winter.

She did it, Shehadi said, not because he asked her, but because she thought it would be a neat thing to do.



Florence Donovan-Gunderson

"It was just a grandma thing to do. That's her," Shehadi said.

Late Tuesday while coaching on the football field, Shehadi received a text message from a friend informing him Donovan-Gunderson, 67, had been gunned down in a Carson City restaurant – one of four killed by a gunman. Her husband, Wally, was wounded.

On Wednesday, Shehadi, other friends and family were coping with the loss of a woman described as outgoing, compassionate and giving.

"It's a tragic loss. All they were doing is getting some

pancakes, for crying out loud," Shehadi said.

Read the whole story

Former Tahoe fire official critical of how Texas fire prevention efforts

By Ashley Powers and Molly Hennessy-Fiske, Los Angeles Times

BASTROP, Texas – Beleaguered firefighters battling one of the most destructive Texas fire seasons on record found themselves punished not only by searing weather, but by lax brush clearance and dwindling budgets.

With no end in sight to scores of blazes – the largest had burned 785 homes and was only 30 percent contained Wednesday – fire officials pleaded for more equipment, and experts urged property owners to do a better job of protecting their homes.

"We needed resources yesterday," Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst said, noting that he and Gov. Rick Perry – who was in California for a debate of GOP presidential contenders – were requesting that the federal government declare the state a major disaster area.

President Obama called Perry to assure the governor that requests for additional assistance would be quickly assessed, the White House said. Officials with the Federal Emergency Management Agency were in Texas preparing financial assessments to help pay the cost of fighting the fires.

It is unclear what the federal government's share of the cost

will be. In the last week, FEMA agreed to cover 75 percent of the expenses of fighting eight fires across the state.

The Texas Forest Service has been spending about $1.5 million a day on fighting the fires this week, agency spokesman Gary Lacox said. That does not include spending by local fire districts and volunteer fire departments.

As state officials scrambled to summon resources, the magnitude of the wildfires – at least 122 as of Wednesday – continued to overwhelm even the most experienced firefighters.

Officials in hard-hit Bastrop County were confident that firefighters would gain control of the state's largest and most destructive blaze as winds ease and residents are allowed back into fire-ravaged neighborhoods, perhaps by week's end. Some residents had done little to prepare for fire.

Ken Gold, a battalion chief from Denton, said residents in a subdivision burned by the Bastrop fire east of Austin had left homes blanketed in six-inch piles of pine needles as dry as matchsticks.

"They kind of let nature be nature," Gold said. "It didn't seem very fire-aware."

The loss of one blue house particularly pained him.

It was a single-story, wood-frame home with a yard full of pine trees. He and his crew spent an hour scraping away pine needles and hosing down the area with water from an above-ground pool. Before he could finish, the fire snaked through the 30-foot-tall pine trees behind him.

"I was calling for help," Gold said. "But everyone was busy somewhere else."

Flames crept within a few feet of the crew.

"Then it got real hot real fast and we had to go," Gold said.

About two hours later, he returned. There was nothing left but some propane tanks and the pool. All Gold could do was sit in the driveway and stare.

The Bastrop fire forced thousands of residents to evacuate and killed two people. Michael Farr, 48, who worked for Austin's electrical department, was found dead at his home in Smithville. The other body was found several miles away and had not been identified late Wednesday.

Lake Travis Fire Rescue Chief Jim Linardos, a Redondo Beach native who worked for years in the North Lake Tahoe area, said Central Texas faced some of the same wildfire risks as California, but lacked the fire-prevention efforts and resources that help California firefighters immediately tackle blazes.

Read the whole story

California on the brink of financial ruin

By Dashka Slater and Gary Rivlin, Newsweek

Toni Sevchuck knows that budgeting is about making tough choices: taxes vs. cuts, parks vs. prisons, health care vs. schools. But as California's austere new state budget goes into effect, the 47-year-old mostly deaf single mother is finding that her own options have run out. "I don't get to make choices," she says. "I don't have the money to make choices with."

The state's Medicaid program, called Medi-Cal in California,

stopped covering dental care in 2009, so Sevchuck has had four molars pulled and is likely to lose a fifth. Last month her welfare and disability payments were cut by 8 percent each, leaving her with $1,160 in monthly aid, plus $200 a month in food stamps. After she pays her rent, she has $310 to pay all her other bills, including a $237 car payment. Each month most of her bills don't get paid. "It doesn't seem like a lot of money to most people," she says of the combined $44 reduction in her monthly checks. "But when you're in my boat, that pays your utilities."

Click here to find out more!

Sevchuck's sense of dwindling options is being echoed across the state. You hear it from the 22-year-old senior at the University of California, Santa Cruz—the first in his family to go to college—whose tuition has risen 80 percent since freshman year. You hear it from the 49-year-old partial quadriplegic in Orange County who may lose the state-funded caregiver who allows her to stay out of a nursing home. And you hear it from the 55-year-old accountant in Inglewood as he braces for the end of state funding for the adult-day-care center where his 75-year-old mother, a retired schoolteacher with advanced dementia, spends her days. "Many of these cuts are hitting the same vulnerable people over and over again," says Lydia Missaelides, executive director of the California Association for Adult Day Services. "It's not sharing the pain, it's really piling on the pain."

As the nation's most populous state and the world's eighth-largest economy, California rarely does things by halves. Dreams are bigger and glossier here, and when they crash, they crash spectacularly. California's per capita foreclosure rate is the highest of any state outside of Nevada. Unemployment has reached a grueling 12 percent, nearly 3 points higher than the national average. And while nearly every state in the union faced budget deficits this year, California's was the nation's largest, at $26.6 billion. The resulting $15 billion

in cuts came on top of the $22.5 billion axed in the previous two budget cycles. By way of contrast, the package of austerity cuts and tax hikes that sent rioters into the streets in Athens this spring totaled $40 billion over three years—and those cuts hadn't even gone into effect when the demonstrations started.

Read the whole story

Bijou Bash delivers fun designed for locals

By Kathryn Reed

All things Tahoe is what Bijou Bash is all about. And it's free.

But that doesn't mean you shouldn't bring money. You might want to buy a *Lake Tahoe News* T-shirt, or tri-tip or a beer or all of the above.



Bijou Bash 2011 is Sept. 10 from 11am-4pm in South Lake Tahoe.

Photo/LTN 2010

New this year is a beer garden, with some of the proceeds going to South Lake Tahoe to defray the cost of putting on the annual event.

Bijou Bash in its current incarnation is in year three with the Sept. 10 event from 11am-4pm at Bijou Community Park. It was first put on at the park in the 1990s before going away for quite a while. Almost 40 vendors have signed up for this year's event.

Nearly 3,000 people attended the 2010 Bijou Bash.

Besides all of the booths to visit, nonstop entertainment is part of the fun. The Derby Dames will demonstrate their prowess at 2:30pm.

BMX'ers will be showing off what they can on two wheels. And skateboarders will try to prove four wheels are better.

For those bringing their four-legged family members, the inaugural doggie parade through the park starts at 12:30pm. Costumes are optional.

Find out how to play disc golf with a skills session on Hole 4.

A street hockey clinic of sorts will be put on by the new operators of the city-owned ice rink.

Throughout the day South Tahoe's public safety officials will let little and big kids see what it's like to sit behind the wheel of a fire engine or maybe turn on the lights of a police car.

If you need a little exercise before buying up the various food items, then be part of the Tahoe Mountain Milers Running Club's free poker fun run/walk. Five stations are on the nearly 2-mile course. Registration starts at 9:45am and race

is at 11am.

If watching the action is more to your liking, a Zumba dance demo starts at 11am. That stage will have performances throughout the day from various local groups.

Parking will be at Lake Tahoe Community College. A shuttle will be running between the lot and the event venue. Parking for cyclists is at Bijou Park.

The schedule is subject to change, so it's best to be at the Bijou Bash all day to avoid missing any of the fun.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• *Nevada* magazine will host the International Regional Magazine Association conference Sept. 9-12 at Reno's Peppermill Resort Spa Casino. In addition to their time spent in Reno, some of the more than 70 conference attendees will tour South Lake Tahoe the afternoon of Sept. 9.

• A University of Nebraska-Lincoln entrepreneur report has Nevada going from the seventh best state nationally for entrepreneurs in 2008 to 47th in 2010.

• State Sen. Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, said about the newest version of Senate Bill x17, which amends the fire tax, "This is just as illegal as the first fire tax but this time they've taken off the gloves and really socked it to rural Californians. This is clearly double taxation and it is being dumped on the backs of the people when the state has 12-percent unemployment and families are struggling just to make ends meet. I will fight this in every way possible – as a legislator and as a private citizen – and want everyone who

might get stuck paying this phony fee to get in the arena and fight it too."

• The third annual Bicycle Achievement Award nominations are open until Oct. 15 for the categories of: Individual, Business, Agency and Organization. Nominations must include a biography and detailed description of the advancement of bicycling. Send to BikeTahoe@aol.com.

• ResorTime.com has revealed its top 10 destinations for timeshare condo rentals, with Lake Tahoe No. 10. Carlsbad-Oceanside is at the top of the list.

Olympian Vonn talks about hole-in-one

By Golf

What could hurtling down a mountain at 80 mph have in common with facing a downhill putt? Plenty, says Olympic gold medalist and recent golf convert Lindsey Vonn. "Mentally, it's the same," Vonn says. "In golf, you have to focus and be calm and have the proper technique without TRYING to have the proper technique. It's like skiing."

Vonn doesn't play as much as she'd like, but she makes the most of her on-course time. Last year she made an ace at the Safeway Invitational charity event at Bayonet Golf Club in Monterey, Calif. "It was 160-something yards," Vonn says. "I didn't even see it go in. I hit a 5-iron. I thought 'Oh, that will be close.' Then my teammates started freaking out and saying, 'You got a hole-in-one!' They were happy for me and at the same time extremely angry because they had been playing

their whole life.” They grew more jealous when they learned it was her first time playing 18 holes.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Barton Foundation fundraiser all about helping the community

To the community,

I would like to thank everyone who attended and supported the Barton Foundation’s Wine Tasting Auction on Aug. 17 at Edgewood Tahoe. We had nearly 100 people join us for this lively event which raised more than $16,000 in support of the Barton Foundation’s Community Health Endowment.

As the executive director of the Barton Foundation, I am always overwhelmed by the generosity of this community and our propensity to give. A fund-raising event is an absolute collaboration from the volunteers who work that night, to the local businesses who donate dinners and goods to our auction, to Edgewood Tahoe who gave us a prime summer date, to my wonderful all-volunteer committee who worked tirelessly to get the right people in the room and the right items in our auctions, it takes a lot of energy to “pull it off”.

The real winner, of course, is our community. The money raised benefits us all – through your support we are able to provide health care to everyone in our community rich or poor; purchase best-in-class equipment, and provide training for our local physicians and nurses on the latest medical advances,

therapies and techniques.

Together, we are making a difference.

Kindle Craig, Barton Foundation executive director

9/11: Terrorist attacks just part of Tahoe’s economic woes

Publisher’s note: ***This is one in a 12-part series running from Sept. 1-12 about how Lake Tahoe is tied to 9/11.***

By Susan Wood

A decade after Sept. 11, 2001, the terrorist attack may not turn out to be the Lake Tahoe economy’s worst enemy. But it didn’t help with the snowball effect of the economic downward spiral.

The South Shore’s long recovery through peaks-and-valleys from a series of economic challenges started in March 2001. It shows a region that’s both reliant on and hard hit by a drop in tourism. The challenges since the March 2001 recession are in line with national trends.

Fear of travel, skyrocketing fuel prices, subsequent wars, high unemployment, a burst housing bubble and a few recessions before and after the horrific event have contributed to a plummet in consumer confidence and travel numbers.



From Sept. 1-12, Lake Tahoe News is looking at 9/11.

Consumer confidence fell substantially according to national reports in one month from August to September 2001. Tourism, and with that hotel occupancy, took a dramatic drop across the nation. In New York City, hotel occupancy fell 40 percent and 3,000 employees were laid off, according to reports compiled by the U.S. Commerce Department.

Then, the worst recession in a generation forced companies to retool, rethink and re-evaluate business as usual.

Throw in smack-you-in-the-eye competition from Indian casinos to the largest South Shore employers, and Tahoe may have lost and seen the last of its tourism heyday.

“Certainly air transportation has become quite a bit more annoying since 9/11,” Lakeside Inn and Casino Chief Executive Officer Mike Bradford told *Lake Tahoe News*, also echoing a few national studies on the subject. “But no doubt, it’s shown how resilient we are (as a country).”

The longtime local businessman has seen all the other economic factors hit the Lake Tahoe Basin hard.

“Tahoe is in a unique situation,” he said, referring to tribal gaming options popping up all over the Central Valley and on the West Slope. What stands out for Bradford while observing the region is in a sense “what hasn’t changed.” And “that’s

unfortunate when you consider what we have to offer," he said, characterizing the lack of an evolving tourism market as a major impediment.

"Because it's no longer an economy based on gaming – we have to make adjustments. I'm not sure we've learned much since (2001), but we'll need to take an educational look at Tahoe after 9/11 and now. Really, I bet it looks not that much different except for the excavation of Project 3 (South Lake Tahoe's convention center redevelopment project based near Stateline)."



Tourists keep coming to Lake Tahoe, but they aren't spending money like they did before 9/11.

The casino chief admitted to the difficulty in quantifying any particular factor like terrorism attacks based on the eastern seaboard. However, 2001 appeared to serve as a catalyst for challenges to business from one side of the United States to the other.

Immediately following Sept. 11, the stock market closed for four days – the third time in history. Only two other events – the 1972 Munich Olympic massacre and the Wall Street bombings of 1920 – showed a 252 trading-day decline in the stock market. Insurance losses topped $30 billion – the worst in

history.

Changes to air travel

“It’s certainly been our Pearl Harbor. From an aviation perspective – using that as a reference point, 9/11 brought a dramatic change to the aviation world. Airlines took a significant beating that some couldn’t recover from. The impact of tourism was huge. When you take a look at the airport now, it’s a hassle some people avoid altogether,” said Adam Mayberry, a Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority board trustee and former spokesman for the Northern Nevada aviation center.

But the problems started even sooner.

“We couldn’t seem to get a break,” Mayberry said. In about the same time period, American Airlines bought Reno Air – which did a substantial business out of the Reno-Tahoe airport – “then reduced flights,” he added.

Right after 9/11, passenger counts “took a dive.”

However, the Reno-based airport experienced a much better recovery than many airports following 9/11. Before 9/11, it offered 80 departures a day. Then with much work, the airport authority and staff did the leg work to get the number back up 72 today.

Current airport spokesman Brian Kulpin cites high fuel prices as more of a culprit, using history to back up the opinion. Five years after 9/11, the departures clawed and scratched their way up to 90 flights a day.

“But when fuel hit $145 per barrel in July 2008, our number of daily departure flights hit a low of 54,” he told *Lake Tahoe News*. Moreover, more than 100 commercial airports nationwide lost all of their air service in summer of 2008.

“In terms of passengers, we saw a drop to 284,000 per month just after 9/11. When fuel hit a $145 per barrel (rate) in

2008, we saw a drop to 283,000 passengers per month in fall 2009," Kulpin pointed out. Just last year, Reno was ranked first in the nation for recovering flights over the decade with a 14 percent increase.

The recession hit airlines like Aloha and Northwest hard, with them either going out of business or merging with another. Then came travel's ugly byproduct of 9/11, the recession and fuel prices – baggage fees and liquid container restrictions.

Impact on the South Shore

The recession has taken its toll on Lake Tahoe business. First, there are the musical chairs of retailers and restaurants on the South Shore. Second, boarded up buildings diminish the natural scenery. Of the businesses left, budget and creative adjustments had to be made.

Marlene Lewis, the manager at the Great Outdoor Clothing Co. at the Y, has noticed a steady decline in business in at least the last handful of years working there.

She points to the combination of Indian casino competition, recession and 9/11 as the culprit for our town's downward spiral.

Lewis worked at Albertsons during 9/11 and remembers how people walked around in a daze in the store.

"But about three years ago, things really started declining," she said, referring to her current business at the Factory Outlet center. She further quantified her shop's drop in business by about 30 percent.

Jana Walker, who runs Sealed With a Kiss and the Lakefront Wedding Chapel, has seen a mixed bag as a result of 9/11 and the recessions. Her retail shop has called on her creativity.

"Being in business here, you have to have creativity, flexibility and ingenuity – or you'll be passed up," she said.

“You can’t rest on your laurels.”

Walker admitted to making fewer buying trips for the Heavenly Village shop since 2001. And buying mistakes are less forgivable than previous decades. In her other business, the wedding chapel has seen a big drop in the large weddings since 9/11.

“People aren’t flying in 50 people or so anymore,” she said.

Even though she cites the recession as a worse culprit to business than 9/11, Walker recalls that time period as a trying one. Days after the terrorist attacks, she organized a local fundraiser for the victims of 9/11 at the casino corridor. Hundreds of people showed up. Most who attended told this reporter that life as we know it had changed forever.

AAUW meeting open to new members

On Sept. 10, South Lake Tahoe AAUW invites potential members to the first general meeting of the program year at 10am at the Aspen Room of Lake Tahoe Community College, South Lake Tahoe.

Speakers will be three local middle school girls who attended Tech Trek Science and Math Camp at UC Davis this summer. The Tech Trek program is based on research which identifies key experiences necessary in developing interest in science, technology, engineering and math programs.

The local branch’s biennial home tour provides the funding to send the girls. A potluck brunch will be served.

To confirm your attendance or find out more, email slocumsrus@msn.com or call (530) 541.2799.

Pedestrian hurt, South Tahoe man in jail on DUI charges

A man walking on Ski Run Boulevard near Forest Avenue in South Lake Tahoe was seriously injured when he was struck by a vehicle.

South Lake Tahoe police officers did not have specifics on the injured man – like his age, hometown or current medical condition.

The accident occurred Sept. 4 at 7:49pm.

Arrested at the scene was Larry Halverson, 60, of South Lake Tahoe. He was arrested on suspicion of driving under the influence as well as causing bodily injury. An enhancement was added because of prior felony convictions that resulted in time spent in prison.

As of Wednesday afternoon Halverson remained in El Dorado County Jail in South Lake Tahoe on $230,000 bail.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report