Opinion: Amtrak must know who is on its trains

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the July 5, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

Amtrak officials are undoubtedly right that it would be impossible, as well as counterproductive, for them to know where every passenger is on a train at any given time, especially on long-distance trains like the California Zephyr involved in a fatal crossing accident on June 24.

A train is not a plane, after all, and it would be unreasonable to expect a passenger to stay tethered to a seat or compartment as they are in a modern airliner.

It is not unreasonable, however, for Amtrak, the quasi-government corporation that runs the nation's long-haul trains, to know who's on board or, at the very least, how many people are riding the rails.

Almost 10 years after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon in Arlington, Va., it is shocking that Amtrak still has no system in place that would tell officials how many passengers are on a train.

Read the whole story

Professor using technology to

get hospitality down to a science

By Liz Benston, Las Vegas Sun

Students at MIT and Stanford use high-tech devices to study nerve impulses in the human brain and subatomic particles in the solar system. Now UNLV students will take a similarly scientific approach to something crucial to this tourism-dependent town: hotel room rates.

Starting in August, a graduate-level class in hotel revenue management at the William F. Harrah College of Hotel Administration will get a crack at software that's expected to revamp some of the management decisions that define the casino niche.

The software simulates hotel management by using mathematical formulas to forecast demand based on bookings from different types of customers and the scheduling of concerts and conventions to attract business. Students will use the software to set rates for hotel rooms based on what customers spend throughout the simulated hotels.

Rather than raising room rates when demand rises, students could give customers free rooms if they expect to make at least $100 off each customer during their hotel stay.

Hotel pricing is largely guesswork despite the widespread use of simpler forecasting systems in the industry, said Mehmet Erdem, a UNLV associate professor who will incorporate the software into his class. Many hotel managers are focused on maximizing room revenue, but charging customers lower rates may be more profitable long term, he said.

"You can't just look at the revenue generated by a room," he said. "You have to look at the revenue generated by each

customer and be willing to adjust prices for those who go to the spa and dine in restaurants.”

Read the whole story

Plane leaks fuel after landing hard in Placerville

By Matt Kawahara, Sacramento Bee

A small airplane attempting to take off from the Placerville Airport on Monday made a hard landing near the runway, causing the pilot to be hospitalized and fuel to leak from the damaged aircraft, officials said.

The plane lifted off briefly before hitting the ground off the side of the runway around 4 p.m., said El Dorado County sheriff’s spokesman Lt. Bryan Golmitz. Officials said the cause is unknown.

Fire crews responded and found the pilot had climbed out of the downed plane, said El Dorado County Fire District Battalion Chief Tim Cordero. The pilot, the only occupant of the plane, was evaluated by paramedics and transported to a local hospital, Cordero said.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe pool remains closed

South Lake Tahoe’s pool is still on hold with maintenance issues.

Swim lessons in the morning and afternoon will go on. If the water is not accessible, then a safety day is planned.

For more information, call (530) 542.6056.

Youth science day

Children are invited to spend Aug. 13 with scientists learning about the unique ecology, function, restoration and preservation of Lake Tahoe.

The 12th annual Children’s Environmental Science Day is a free event sponsored by the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center.

More than 20 interactive science activities hosted by organizations around the region will be available for children ages 6 and up. The day will include interactive science demonstrations by UC Davis scientists, local agency and nonprofit organization staff, and AmeriCorps members. Hands-on activities are designed for the whole family to enjoy.

Get up close and personal with fish and microscopic zooplankton from Lake Tahoe, learn about invasive species in the Tahoe basin, test the water quality of a stream and observe mosquito fish eating their prey. This exciting event will bring together many of our community partners who are

committed to protecting Lake Tahoe and its watershed.

Children's Environmental Science Day is at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences in Incline Village. The Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences is located on the Sierra Nevada College campus at 291 Country Club Drive in Incline Village, off Highway 28.

For more information, call (775) 881.7560, ext. 7474.

Parole: Garrido upbeat 9 days after kidnapping Dugard

By Sam Stanton and Denny Walsh, Sacramento Bee

Nine days after they kidnapped Jaycee Lee Dugard, Phillip and Nancy Garrido paid a visit to his parole officer, who indicated things seemed to be going quite well for the convicted rapist and kidnapper.

"No major changes," the federal parole agent wrote on June 19, 1991, adding later, "A lot of complex issue (sic) with this case.

"He talked about the way he met Nancy and their life together. He seems committed to their relationship."

The upbeat assessment is part of Garrido's voluminous federal parole file, made public for the first time Monday through a Freedom of Information Act request that the *Bee* filed in September 2009.

The file, released as Dugard's memoir goes on sale today, gives the most complete assessment to date of the numerous

visits to Garrido's home by federal parole agents who never noticed the 11-year-old kidnap victim being held captive in the backyard.

While partially redacted, the file underscores the agents' lax supervision of Garrido, and demonstrates how easy it was for him to con some officials and co-workers into believing he had reformed himself.

Read the whole story

Principal changes at St. Theresa School

By Kathryn Reed

Anne Filce is in the principal's office and Danette Winslow is back in the classroom full time.

The change at St. Theresa School in South Lake Tahoe became effective July 1, though the decision was made during the last school year. It's the head pastor who makes the administrative decision.

Filce has been a teacher at the Catholic K-8 school on and off since 1996. In addition to her job as principal, she will also be teaching the 4-5 combination class like she did last year.

Winslow was in the classroom some of her years while principal. She was not available for comment.

Filce said she would be attending Catholic school management training courses later this month. Her focus will be on

learning about recruitment and retention of students.

In 2005, the school had more than 200 students, while in 2010-11 there were less than 90.

Filce pointed to the economy – South Lake Tahoe had an unemployment rate of 17 percent in May – and families moving as reasons enrollment has declined.

Her school is not alone. Lake Tahoe Unified and Douglas County school districts are facing the same dilemma on the South Shore.

However, Filce does have making calls to parents who no longer have kids at St. Theresa on her to-do list this summer before classes begin Sept. 6.

St. Theresa is the only Catholic school in the basin, with the next nearest one being in El Dorado Hills. Filce said even though rumors have floated the school is closing; she said there is no truth to that.

Besides enrollment concerns, Filce will also be spearheading the accreditation process that begins in the fall.

Her contract is for one year, which Filce said is normal for Catholic schools – to renew them annually.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The summer evening speaker series at Taylor Creek Visitor Center in the South Shore is every Wednesday and Thursday evening through August at the Lake of the Sky Amphitheater. Here is the schedule.

• South Tahoe Public Utility District's 2011-12 budget is on its website for all to read. Then go to the Finance Department page.

• Check out Tahoe Regional Young Professionals at work. Filming was done by Brandi Ledbetter of South Lake Tahoe's Princess Productions.

• Where We Met Gelateria and Espresso Bar has opened in Tahoma.

• Tahoe City's inaugural Farm to Table Dinner is July 19 from 6-9pm at Commons Beach. More in formation is online.

Opinion: Nevada needs to do something about rail, road safety

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the July 4, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

As each day passes more revelations come to light about the deadly Amtrak train crash June 24 and alarming safety issues on Nevada's rails and roadways when it comes to trains and trucks.

These are issues that need immediate action and have implications for everyone counting on safety along Nevada's roads and tracks from train passengers and crews members to truck drivers.

As investigators continue their work on the truck-train crash that left six dead and dozens injured, information brought to light by the *Reno Gazette-Journal* reveals first-hand reports of trouble earlier at the same site. Nine months ago, a different truck almost crashed into another Amtrak passenger train at the U.S. 95 site 70 miles east of Reno.

Now, stereotypical of government reacting after the fact, a Nevada agency is launching a statewide investigation into all Nevada roads with high speed limits and railroad crossings.

Also unacceptable for Nevada, is that trucker Lawrence Valli, who plowed into an Amtrak train, had two additional speeding violations besides the four reported by the state Department of Motor Vehicles. But the speeding citations – and Valli's other tickets for driving without insurance, without a seatbelt and talking on a cellphone – did not reach a level under Nevada law that would have allowed officials to suspend or revoke Valli's license.

Safely off the rails now, Ron Kaminkow, engineer on the Amtrak train that was hit by the truck late last month, told *Gazette-Journal* reporter Martha Bellisle that the U.S. 95 crash site is dangerous. He hopes changes are made so that crashes like the one he was in never occur again.

Read the whole story

Concert benefits LTCC music department

Lake Tahoe Community College’s music department’s “Music of the Night” fundraiser concert features music from the Broadway musicals “Phantom of the Opera” and “Jekyll and Hyde” on July 23 in the college’s Duke Theatre.

The concert will feature LTCC music instructor Mark D. Williams and friends.

Tickets are $15 general admission and are available at the door or in advance. Email Williams@ltcc.edu for tickets or information.

The concert starts at 8pm.

Proceeds go toward the music department’s purchase of a concert grand piano.