Lull in visitors to national parks

By Michael Doyle, McClatchy Newspapers

WASHINGTON — Go ahead, blame harsh weather or high gas prices for a marked reduction in visits to Yosemite and other national parks so far this year. The summer droves, though, are returning.

In other words, the time to really beat the crowds may have passed.

At traditionally popular parks from Yosemite and Yellowstone to Mount Rainier and the Great Smoky Mountains, visitation from January through May fell compared with last year, sometimes dramatically. The smaller crowds thrilled park visitors but worried the businesses that depend on them.

“The concessionaires and the gateway communities had a very tough spring,” Yosemite National Park spokesman Scott Gediman acknowledged Tuesday, “but the summer will be huge.”

Through May 31, Yosemite reported an approximately 7 percent decline in recreation visits compared with the same period last year; the Great Smoky Mountains’ decline exceeded 8 percent.

Elsewhere, the falloff has been even more dramatic. Yellowstone recorded a 14 percent decline in recreation visits through May 31 compared with 2010, and Mount Rainier reported a stunning 26 percent reduction.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Get back to basics to get economy going

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the June 21, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

By now, it has become crystal clear that there is no magic bullet for what ails the American economy.

Nowhere is that more true than in Nevada, where the nation-leading unemployment rate fell slightly, to 12.1 percent in April but rose in the state's two most populous counties, Washoe and Clark, where it matters most. (The jobless rate is more volatile in rural counties, where small changes in the actual numbers can cause wide swings in rates.)

What we've seen during the past few years is that there isn't much that either Congress or the Federal Reserve Board can do that will convince cautious consumers that this is a good time to start spending again or pessimistic business owners and managers that the time is right to hire again.

It should now be apparent that it will take considerable time for this state to regain what it lost when the once-booming economy collapsed. It will take patience and more than a little derring-do by entrepreneurs who see opportunities where everyone else sees only gloom.

Nevadans shouldn't be looking for a home run. What they need is a lot of singles.

Read the whole story

South Lake Tahoe launches user-friendly website

By Kathryn Reed

Information about South Lake Tahoe is finally easily accessible.

The city replaced its outdated website this month with one that can actually be navigated without needing a doctorate in information technology. Visually, it's also inviting.

It has all the info readers will want, but it is presented in a format with the user in mind instead of the government employee.



South Lake Tahoe's website has been overhauled.

Instead of listing departments – which might not be intuitive to most people – a tab called "City Services" has the general categories people would seek. Most people with a planning question would not instinctively know this falls under the Development Services Department. That is why "Planning, Land

Use & Zoning” is a category under “City Services”.

One of the constant complaints the city receives through surveys and other means is people don’t know what is going on. Calendars on the website are aimed at making that issue go away.

While the website is still a work in progress, that is actually a good thing, according to city officials. A goal of the city’s is to be more responsive to citizens – residents and tourists. This includes having a website that provides people with what they want. So, if something is missing, it can be added.

The last website was difficult for staff to update because of the old-style platform and technology that were used. (The old site was up for at least a decade without any real upgrades.)

Twenty-two employees are trained to work on the website, with two being the gatekeepers to what sees the light of day. That number is likely to change as time goes by. The reviewers are checking to make sure the message and format is consistent, and to weed out duplicate information.

Another issue this site is addressing is better communication with the public.

“It is easy to track our responsiveness,” city spokeswoman Nancy Kerry told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This is because the feature “Let’s Talk” that is accessed via the home page allows people to ask specific questions. It goes to the appropriate person, and usually to multiple people. The person asking the question can then track the response. The exchange, while visible on the city’s website to the person posing the question, is not sitting there for the whole world to see.

Until this week people wanting to ask the fire department a

question had to do so in writing and deliver it to the station. Not so with the online questionnaire.

One thing still being worked out is if police reports will one day be available by asking for it through the city's website.

A category not often found on government websites is the "Communication Center" – another tool to interact with people. People can be sent emails about a slew of things by going under "City News," then to the right is a button saying "Notify Me". Social media is another venue to stay in touch with the city.

"We want two-way communication," Kerry said.

Updates on city projects are also provided.

For people who want to read the content in another language, every page allows the words to be translated.

The website cost $36,000 to build – which according to Kerry – is cheap for a government site, and one that functions like the city's does. It has 300 pages, with more that can be added as needed.

Moody's: Caesars Entertainment finances vulnerable to weak economy

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Debt-laden Las Vegas Strip casino giants Caesars Entertainment Corp. and MGM Resorts International could be hurt more than

competitors by continued weakness in the U.S. economy, Moody's Investors Service reported recently.

In a special report on concerns the U.S. economic recovery may be slowing, Caesars and MGM Resorts were named as being "more reliant on continued economic improvements to grow out of the their high (debt) leverage than higher-rated companies are.''

Caesars is the parent company of Harrah's and Harveys at Stateline.

"While gaming companies took their lumps during the Great Recession and have largely put themselves back on track, they remain vulnerable to bumps in the U.S. economic recovery given their decimated balance sheets,'' Moody's said. "If consumers cut their gambling budgets or casino trips, company earnings could be affected. This could result in (debt) downgrades of especially lower-rated companies that have been counting on a stronger economic recovery.''

Moody's noted the Federal Reserve last week reported that the economy was expanding less quickly than it predicted and unemployment may remain high longer than expected.

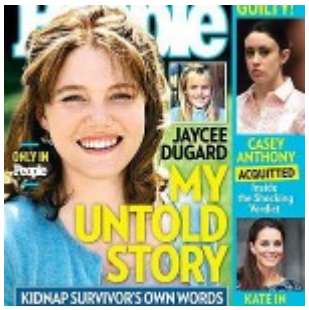
Read the whole story

Magazine to publish excerpts of Dugard's memoir

By People magazine

The memories are vividly clear for Jaycee Dugard. From the day she was kidnapped by Phillip Garrido in June 1991 to her miraculous rescue 18 years later, Dugard's will to survive

never faltered.



People has covered her kidnapping, years of captivity in Antioch, Calif., her tearful reunion with her family and the revelation that years of sexual abuse resulted in two pregnancies, the first when she was only 14.

People's latest issue has exclusive excerpts from the now 31-year-old's memoir, "A Stolen Life".

Read the whole story

Award offered in poisoning of dog in Meyers

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The Humane Society of the United States is offering a $2,500 reward in connection with what is believed to be the intentional poisoning of a dog in the Meyers area near South Lake Tahoe.

An Irish Wolfhound named "Bella" was found having a seizure on the deck of its owners' home in Meyers June 25.

After the dog died, it was taken to a veterinarian, who thought it had been poisoned with rodent bait laced with strychnine.

Read the whole story

Nevada officials alert as wildfire threat increases

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

After a particularly quick-moving wildfire burned more than 17 square miles east of Reno, danger posed by dry grass and brush is abundantly clear, fire officials said Tuesday.

While a late-season snowpack continues to dampen fire danger in the high country, heat-cured cheatgrass and drying sagebrush combine to produce a significant risk in the lower elevations of western Nevada.

“The probability of ignition is definitely getting higher,” said Paul Petersen, a fire management officer for the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

The danger was demonstrated Saturday when a wildfire took off east of Reno near Nixon, quickly burning across miles of grass and brush. No structures were damaged and the fire was declared contained Monday after charring 11,195 acres.

Read the whole story

Lecture about women’s health

issues

Allison Steinmetz with Barton Internal Medicine, will talk about women's health issues Oct. 26 from 6:30-7:30pm at Lake Tahoe Community College, 1 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe.

Steinmetz will discuss perimenopause, which is the process of change that leads up to menopause. She also will provide the different remedy options, both natural and hormonal for menopause which is a natural part of growing older for women.

For more information, call (530) 543.5656.

Blood drive on South Shore

Barton Auxiliary blood drive is Oct. 1 from 11am-6pm at

the South Lake Tahoe library, 1000 Rufus Allen Blvd.

Call Dan Kerr at (775) 588.2376 for info.

Winemaker dinner benefits Barton Foundation

Capisce in Zephyr Cove is partnering with Dry Creek to host a winemaker's dinner on Aug. 16 starting with cocktails at 5:30pm, then dinner at 6:30pm.

A portion of the proceeds will benefit Barton Foundation's

Community Health Endowment.

For more information and reservations, contact Capisce at (775) 580.7500.