Sculptor’s work to be featured in Napa Valley



Peter Hazel’s fish will be on display in the Napa Valley. Photo/Provided

Peter Hazel is a popular North Shore artist with a colorful mosaic sculpture of a brook trout outside Lanza’s restaurant in King’s Beach, as well as other sculptures in California and Colorado.

On April 9 two new sculptures had a send-off party as they head to Yountville to be displayed as part of that town’s Art Walk. The two sculptures are large – one a 5-foot Sockeye salmon atop a big boulder, the other a giant basket of heirloom tomatoes. Both of these ceramic sculptures have been entirely handmade by Hazel and his team in his studio in Verdi.

They are also working on a 15-foot high daffodil and a series of fish sculptures featuring locally-found sports fish.

California tax collections increase

By Dan Walters, Sacramento Bee

California's tax revenues jumped by $18.2 billion in 2013, thanks to an improving economy and the impact of a temporary sales and income tax increase approved by voters, a new Census Bureau report shows.

All tax collections, including those for special purposes as well as the state general fund, increased from $115 billion in 2012 to $133.2 billion last year, with virtually of the increase generated by sales and income taxes. The general fund received about 75 percent of the taxes.

California's 15.6 percent increase was more than twice the 6.1 percent increase recorded by all states, the Census Bureau reported, Total state collections were $846.2 billion last year, with California's $133.2 billion being 15.7 percent of all state taxes, even though the state has just 12.2 percent of the nation's population.

Read the whole story

Heroin spreads misery throughout U.S.

By Amy Forliti, Dan Sewelll and Nigel Duara, AP

On a beautiful Sunday last October, Detective Dan Douglas stood in a suburban Minnesota home and looked down at a lifeless 20-year-old – a needle mark in his arm, a syringe in his pocket. It didn't take long for Douglas to realize that the man, fresh out of treatment, was his second heroin overdose that day.

"You just drive away and go, 'Well, here we go again,'" says the veteran cop.

In Butler County, Ohio, heroin overdose calls are so common that the longtime EMS coordinator likens the situation to "coming in and eating breakfast – you just kind of expect it to occur." A local rehab facility has a six-month wait. One school recently referred an 11-year-old boy who was shooting up intravenously.

Sheriff Richard Jones has seen crack, methamphetamine and pills plague his southwestern Ohio community but says heroin is a bigger scourge. Children have been forced into foster care because of addicted parents; shoplifting rings have formed to raise money to buy fixes.

"There are so many residual effects," he says. "And we're all paying for it."

Heroin is spreading its misery across America. And communities everywhere are indeed paying.

The death of actor Philip Seymour Hoffman spotlighted the reality that heroin is no longer limited to the back alleys of American life. Once mainly a city phenomenon, the drug has spread – gripping postcard villages in Vermont, middle-class enclaves outside Chicago, the sleek urban core of Portland, Ore., and places in between and beyond.

It remains a small part of America's drug problem; cocaine, Ecstasy, painkillers and tranquilizers are all used more, and the latest federal overdose statistics show that in 2010 the

vast majority of drug overdose deaths involved pharmaceuticals, with heroin accounting for less than 10 percent.

But heroin's escalation is troubling. Last month, U.S. Attorney General Eric Holder called the 45 percent increase in heroin overdose deaths between 2006 and 2010 an "urgent and growing public health crisis."

In 2007, there were an estimated 373,000 heroin users in the U.S. By 2012, the number was 669,000, with the greatest increases among those 18 to 25. First-time users nearly doubled in a six-year period ending in 2012, from 90,000 to 156,000.

The surge is easily explained. Experts note that many users turned to heroin after a crackdown on prescription drug "pill mills" made painkillers such as OxyContin harder to find and more costly. Whereas a gram of prescription opiates may go for $1,000 on the street, that same gram of heroin will sell for $100, authorities say.

It's killing because it can be extremely pure or laced with other powerful narcotics. That, coupled with a low tolerance once people start using again after treatment, is catching addicts off guard.

In hard-hit places, police, doctors, parents and former users are struggling to find solutions and save lives.

"I thought my suburban, middle-class family was immune to drugs such as this," says Valerie Pap, who lost her son, Tanner, to heroin in 2012 in Anoka County, Minn., and speaks out to try and help others. "I've come to realize that we are not immune. … Heroin will welcome anyone into its grasp."

Minnesota: Message for the masses

The night before Valentine's Day, about 250 people filed into

a Baptist church in Spring Lake Park, Minn., a bedroom community north of Minneapolis that brags of its “small-town charm and friendly folks.” There were moms and dads of addicts, as well as children whose parents brought them in hopes of scaring them away from smack.

From the stage, Dan Douglas gripped a microphone as a photograph appeared overhead on a screen: A woman in the fetal position on a bathroom floor. Then another: A woman “on the nod” – passed out with drug paraphernalia and a shoe near her face.

Douglas didn’t mince words. “You just don’t win with heroin,” he declared. “You die or you go to jail.”

It was the third such forum held over two weeks in Anoka County, which encompasses 440 square miles of urban neighborhoods, rural homesteads and suburban centers that are home to nearly 340,000 souls. Since 1999, 55 Anoka County residents have died from heroin-related causes. Only one other Minnesota county reported more heroin-related deaths – 58 – and it has a population three-and-a-half times greater than Anoka’s.

In 2009, when Douglas began supervising a drug task force, authorities were focused on stamping out meth labs. Heroin, with its dark and dirty image, just wasn’t a concern. Then investigators noticed a climb in pharmacy robberies and started finding Percocet and OxyContin during routine marijuana busts.

As prescription drug abuse rose, so, too, did federal and state crackdowns aimed at shutting down pill mills and increasing tracking of prescriptions and pharmacy-hopping pill seekers. Users turned to heroin.

“It hit us in the face in the form of dead bodies,” says Douglas. “We didn’t know how bad it was until it was too late here in our community.”

Douglas says authorities are doing what they can: educating doctors about the dangers of overprescribing painkillers, holding events where residents can dispose of prescription opiates, and aggressively trying to get drugs off the street. But, he says, “law enforcement cannot do this alone.”

The idea for the forums came not from police but rather from Pap, a third-grade teacher whose youngest son died of a heroin overdose.

Tanner was an athlete who graduated from high school with honors. In fall 2012, he was pursuing a psychology degree at the University of Minnesota, and dreamed of becoming a drug counselor. He had not, to his mother’s knowledge, ever used drugs, and certainly not heroin.

Then one day Tanner’s roommates found the 21-year-old unconscious in his bedroom.

Amid her grief, Pap realized something needed to be done to educate others. She met with county officials, and the community forums began soon after. At each, Pap shared her family’s story.

“Our lives have been forever changed. Heroin took it all away,” she told the crowd in Spring Lake Park.

Douglas says most heroin-related deaths he has seen involve victims who struggled with the drug for years. The detective usually tries to shield his own boys, ages 7 and 11, from what he sees on the job. But after meeting parents like Pap, Douglas shared his heroin presentation with his oldest son, complete with the sobering pictures.

“Could I still be blindsided? Absolutely,” he says. “But it’s not going to be for lack of information on my part. … I don’t want to scare my kid. I don’t want to scar my kid. But I sure as hell don’t want to bury him.”

Ohio: OD antidote helps save lives

Brakes screech. The hospital door flies open. A panicked voice shouts: “Help my friend!” Medical technicians race outside with a gurney. An unconscious young man is lifted aboard, and the race is on to stop another heroin user from dying.

It’s known as a “drive-up, drop-off,” and it’s happened repeatedly at Ohio’s Fort Hamilton Hospital. The staff’s quick response and a dose of naloxone, an opiate-reversing drug, bring most patients back. But not all. Some are put on ventilators. A few never revive.

“We’ve certainly had our share of deaths,” says Dr. Marcus Romanello, head of the ER. “At least five died that I am acutely aware of … because I personally cared for them.”

Romanello joined the hospital about two years ago, just as the rise of heroin was becoming noticeable in Hamilton, a blue-collar city of 60,000 people. Now it seems to be reaching into nearly every part of daily life.

“If you stood next to somebody and just started a conversation about heroin, you’d hear: ‘Oh yeah, my nephew’s on heroin. My next-door neighbor’s on heroin. My daughter’s on heroin,'” says Candy Murray Abbott, who helped her own 27-year-old son through withdrawal.

Abbott and childhood friend Tammie Norris, whose daughter was also a heroin user, decided last year to bring attention to the problem in their hometown, using Facebook to organize poster-waving demonstrations by everyone from recovering addicts to parents and grandparents of children who died of overdoses.

Norris could only shake her head at the surge in attention to heroin after Hoffman’s death. “Well, duh,” she says, “it’s been happening to our kids every day – and nobody sees it.”

A couple decades ago, the big problem in Hamilton was cocaine. That shifted to prescription drug abuse, which morphed into heroin as pharmaceuticals grew harder to come by. Now heroin-related deaths have more than tripled in Butler County, where Hamilton is the county seat. There were 55 deaths last year, and within one two-week period, the city's emergency paramedic units responded to 18 heroin overdoses. Once, they had five overdose runs in a single day.

Users run the gamut, says EMS veteran Jennifer Mason – from streetwalkers to business executives. They die in cars, public parks, restaurant bathrooms, a university building. Mason has found people turning blue with needles still in their arms.

Sojourner Recovery Services, an addiction treatment organization in Hamilton, has a six-month waiting list for beds for male addicts.

Romanello's hospital saw 200 heroin overdose cases last year, and countless related problems: abscesses from using unsterile needles, heart-damaging endocarditis and potentially fatal sepsis infections.

Overdose patients usually bounce back quickly after given naloxone, known by the brand name Narcan. It works by blocking the brain receptors that opiates latch onto and helping the body "remember" to take in air.

At least 17 states and the District of Columbia allow Narcan to be distributed to the public, and bills are pending in some states to increase access to it. Attorney General Holder has called for more first responders to carry it. Last month, Ohio's Republican governor signed into law a measure allowing a user's friends or relatives to administer Narcan, on condition that they call 911.

Romanello says his patients are usually relieved and grateful by the time they leave his hospital. "They say, 'Thank you for saving my life,' and walk out the door. But then, the

withdrawal symptoms start to kick in.”

“You would think that stopping breathing is hitting rock bottom,” adds Mason. “They don’t have that fear of dying. You’ve blocked the heroin, and they have to have it. They go back out to get more. You haven’t fixed their addiction.”

Oregon: Former addict fights back

Before 9 o’clock every weekday morning, the secret to one of the most successful drug rehabilitation clinics in Portland waits behind a locked door. Meet David Fitzgerald, leader of the mentor program at Central City Concern, which claims a 60 percent success rate for treating heroin addiction.

The lock, Fitzgerald says, is a necessity because his addicts will take every opportunity offered, including early access to the “mentor room.”

Inside, the walls are covered in photos, including a collage from last year’s group picnic. Recovering addicts smile and hold plates of food. Seven months later, Fitzgerald looks over the faces. Are they all still sober? Are they all still alive?

“Most of them,” he says. “Not all.”

Heroin cut a gash through the Pacific Northwest in the 1990s. Then prescription pills took over until prices rose. Now the percentage of those in treatment for heroin in Oregon is back up to levels not seen since the ’90s – nearly 8,000 people last year – and the addicts are getting younger.

Central City’s clients reflect that. In 2008, 25 percent of them were younger than 35. Last year that went to 40 percent.

“A lot of them aren’t ready at a younger age,” Fitzgerald says. “The drug scene, it’s fast … it’s different. It’s harder than it was.”

Fitzgerald, 63, speaks with a laconic prison patois, a

reflection of 20-plus years incarcerated, all the while addicted to various drugs. The worst was heroin. In 1997 he got sober, and in 1999 he joined Central City Concern, then a burgeoning outfit.

Fitzgerald saw that the usual path for treating addiction wasn't working. Addicts were processed through detox for seven or eight days, then handed a list of tasks that included finding work, meeting with a probation officer, and locating the drop site for their daily food box.

"Like they're going to do any of that," Fitzgerald scoffs. "First thing they do is see somebody they know, get that fix."

Central City Concern instead accompanies clients to housing appointments, keeps their daylight hours filled with to-dos and requires they spend idle hours at the facility, where they also sleep.

It's a bare-bones staff operating on a razor-thin budget, and the crop of younger addicts presents a new problem: finding appropriately aged mentors to match them with. But Fitzgerald has hope in 26-year-old Felecia Padgett, who remembers clearly the first time she fired heroin into her veins.

"I heard one time somebody say it's like kissing God," says Padgett. "It is. It's like getting to touch heaven."

Padgett's six-year tumble involved, in order: heroin smoked, heroin shot intravenously, homelessness, one overdose, two close calls, a suicide attempt, arrest, jail, arrest, jail, arrest, jail and, finally, a one-shot, last-chance stop at Central City.

Before sobriety, she found herself selling to people younger than herself, suburban kids rolling up in their parents' cars.

Fitzgerald doesn't yet have money to pay her, and Padgett herself is still in recovery. But she, and others like her,

may play a crucial role in confronting the problem as the face of Portland's heroin addiction gets younger.

Fitzgerald knows that many of the clients he sees at 25 may be back in rehab at 35, but he tries to remain optimistic that some of what they learn at Central City will, ultimately, make a difference.

"That's about all you can do," he says, "hope some of it sticks."

Beef prices sizzling in the U.S.

By David Pierson and Tiffany Hsu, Los Angeles Times

Come grilling season, expect your sirloin steak to come with a hearty side of sticker shock.

Beef prices have reached all-time highs in the U.S. and aren't expected to come down any time soon.

Extreme weather has thinned the nation's beef cattle herds to levels last seen in 1951, when there were about half as many mouths to feed in America.

The retail value of "all-fresh" USDA choice-grade beef jumped to a record $5.28 a pound in February, up from $4.91 the same time a year ago. The same grade of beef cost $3.97 as recently as 2008.

Read the whole story

K’s Kitchen: 3 Pepper Pasta

By Kathryn Reed

Easy, tasty meals are ideal during busy weeks.

The recipe below is one of my go-to dishes when I don’t have a lot of time to be in the kitchen. And it’s also one of those recipes where there are leftovers.

It has been years since I’ve bought prepared pesto from the store. Instead, I make a ton of pesto at the end of summer or early fall and then freeze it so I have it on hand throughout the winter/spring until the farmers’ markets start up again so I can get fresh basil. This isn’t to say prepared pesto should not be used.

The peppers can be of any color. And you don’t have to use three different colors. But the more color, the prettier it is going to be. Red, yellow and orange peppers are all naturally sweeter than green bell peppers.

Chop all the veggies into bite size or smaller pieces.

I use spaghetti for the pasta, but I’m sure a different type would be just fine.

The most difficult thing about this recipe is mixing the ingredients together so there is a little of everything in each bite.



3 Pepper Pasta

Olive oil

1 medium onion, chopped

1 each green, yellow and red pepper, chopped

1 14½-ounce can chopped tomatoes

1 tsp basil

½ tsp oregano

Pepper

¼ C pesto

Pasta

Cook pasta according to directions.

Coat saucepan with olive oil. Add onion and peppers. Cook until soft. Add tomatoes and seasoning. Cook another five minutes.

Drain pasta. Add pesto. Thoroughly coat pasta.

Return pasta to pan. Add vegetable mixture to pasta. Mix and serve.

Evaluation uncovers home water waste

By Kathryn Reed

All it took was looking at the tank size and the handle for the water wise evaluator to know the toilet was installed before 1992. In the world of toilets, that’s pretty darn old. Even worse, it’s a water hog.

Toilets already use the most amount of water of any household appliance – 26 percent. And an old one, well, it’s practically off the charts.

That was one of the many lessons I learned when Donielle Morse came to my house this month to perform a water wise evaluation. South Tahoe Public Utility District offers this service for free so people can learn ways to conserve water, identify leaks, and figure out if apparatuses are efficient.

“Not efficient” was the finding for one of the two toilets. STPUD has a rebate offer now of up to $100 if pre-1992 toilets are replaced with a high efficiency toilet that flushes 1.28 gallons. Ours is flushing at least 2 gallons each time.



Donielle Morse tests the flow of water at the kitchen sink. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Then Morse gave me a bit of a lecture about what to be flushing. There was a huge spider in the bathtub when she went to check things there. I killed it with a tissue. It went in the garbage – because she said so – instead of down the drain.

“Only toilet paper breaks down,” Morse, who is a water conservation specialist, told me. “Even tissues don’t break down as well as toilet paper. If you were going to flush the spider, you would have wasted 1.6 gallons.”

And she also said the flushable wipes that are sold in stores are flushable in the sense they go down the drain. The problem is they don’t decompose. So in the water-sewer world they really aren’t flushable.

Before Morse makes a house call she does a little research to see if people are on meters. (Not yet for us.) She looks at water consumption. She checks the age of a house because those built before 1992 are likely to have water-guzzling units. That is the year plumbing codes changed for low flow devices.

A low flow toilet, like in the guest bath, is a 1.6-gallon

toilet.

Then Morse asks a series of questions to help her evaluate how our use might be changed to save some water. (I think I would use paper plates before I sacrifice long, hot showers.)

Questions include length of showers, how many a week, how many people in a household and things about irrigation.

Every place there is a faucet she looks for leaks. She even does this with the toilets by dropping a dye tablet into the tank.

Morse has a goodie bag of sorts with her. She leaves me with two aerators for the bathroom faucets. These were easy to screw in. They reduce the amount of water coming out so less is wasted.

Showerheads, kitchen sink aerators and toilet flappers can also be distributed for free of charge if she sees the need and people will use them.

The washing machine was replaced a few years ago, so nothing more to be done in that room. The district still offers a rebate on washing machines, which helped us save some money. Washing machines are the second largest water using appliance.

When it comes to washing dishes, Morse says, “Even older dishwashers are more efficient than hand washing.”

All California households are supposed to reduce their water consumption by 20 percent as outlined in Gov. Jerry Brown’s drought declaration earlier this year.

Snow was on the ground so we could not test the sprinklers for efficiency.

STPUD continues to offer its turf buyback program.

Water restrictions will be enforced this year. Even numbered

addresses may water on Monday, Wednesday and Friday; odd numbered on Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday.

Morse suggests people adjust their sprinklers monthly to compensate for temperature. A yard doesn't need the same amount of water in June as it does in August.

"We recommend watering in the early morning or evening to prevent evaporation," Morse said. It's also less windy at those times.

There are even high-efficiency sprinkler heads.

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Notes:

• To schedule a water wise evaluation, contact Donielle Morse at 530.543.6368 or dmorse@stpud.dst.ca.us.

Letter: Truxlers should be applauded

To the community,

Now that the smoke has cleared on the fireworks show, it's time to tip my hat and raise a glass to the Truxlers. They have helped open our eyes to see that the South Shore of Lake Tahoe is an epicenter of ecological hypocrisy. It's said we love the lake, but don't anyone do a thing that messes with the flow of greenbacks that fill South Shore pockets regardless of the harm an event could do or will do to the lake ad basin.



Bill Crawford

Especially pitiful is the verbal assault launched against the Truxlers because they exercised their lawful right to file a lawsuit to address what they believed needed to be remedied, the blight on the shoreline caused by the fireworks show. Many comments, such as Councilman Tom Davis', were down right threatening. He said that the Truxlers had better withdraw their lawsuit. It sounded like an or else. Or else what? And that was the tone echoed by many who commented on the subject. You had better get out of Dodge if you don't like what's going on here.

It appears that too many in town would damn freedom's bell if the lawsuit had continued. Well, the hot heads can simmer down. There will be a 4th of July fireworks show. And it would be right on that day for all of the church bells to ring loud and clear at an appointed hour to remind all of us why we celebrate on the 4th of July. Let freedom ring. We need to hear liberty's bell now and forever.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

PS: I am reminded by what happened to the Truxlers that Henrik Ibsen wrote a play "An Enemy of the People" that dealt with a similar situation in a resort town in Norway. The play should be performed here by the college. It would be a dose of good medicine for a town that needs it.

U.S. soda sales continue downward spiral

By Phil Wahba, Reuters

Americans cut back on drinking carbonated soft drinks again last year with soda sales reaching their lowest levels in nearly two decades, according to a leading beverage industry newsletter.

Total sales volume fell 3 percent in 2013 to 8.9 billion cases, the ninth straight year of decline and the lowest since 1995, according to Beverage Digest. Soda sales fell 1.2 percent in 2012 and 1 percent in 2011. Each case is equal to 192 liquid ounces.

Soda sales in the United States grew throughout most of the 1990s, before beginning to slow in 1999. Sales have been in decline since 2005.

Read the whole story

LTCC decision on SnowGlobe expected in May

By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe City Manager Nancy Kerry made a case Tuesday for why Lake Tahoe Community College should allow SnowGlobe to

continue on the school’s adjacent ball field.

The two public agencies own the field, with the city responsible for maintaining it.

The college board of trustees at its first May meeting is expected to vote on whether the three-day year-end music festival should return for years four, five and six.

The city last month agreed to a three-year contract with the promoter. But the event won’t happen without the college’s OK.

“As soon as the field is replaced, it won’t come back,” Kerry said of the festival. The field could be replaced at a potential cost of $750,000 in the next 30 to 36 months.

The goal is to find a turf company that has been in existence for a while. The firm the city used for the existing field went out of business before the warranty expired.

“The sample that was shown is not what was installed,” according to Roberta Mason, LTCC board president.

When Measure S was approved the voters thought they would be getting multiple fields. They got one multi-use field instead.

Kerry told the board it’s not the festival that is the field’s major deterioration, but instead it’s snow.

“Snow itself and how it melts creates a wobbly field,” Kerry said.

While the city wants to keep SnowGlobe on the South Shore, a suitable replacement venue has yet to be secured. It is estimated the event brings in $6 million to the region.

Study: Calif. women make 84 cents for every $1 men do

By Shan Li, Los Angeles Times

Despite all the recent focus on female empowerment and “leaning in” at work, California women are still paid just 84 cents for every $1 paid to men in the state.

In the Golden State, a woman who works a full-time job earns, on average, $41,956 a year, compared with $50,139 for a man who works full time, according to an analysis from the nonprofit advocacy group the National Partnership for Women & Families. That’s a wage gap of $8,183 per year between the genders.

Collectively, California women lose out on a total of nearly $37.7 billion annually, the report said.

Read the whole story