Ta-Hoe Nalu Stand-Up Paddle Classic

The 2011 Quiksilver Ta-Hoe Nalu Stand-Up Paddle Classic is Aug. 13-14 in Kings Beach.

Lake Tahoe is the largest stand up flat-water paddleboard venue in the country, and the sport continues to gain in popularity with a recent increase in Tahoe rental shops and outfitters, as well as festivals taking center stage during the summer and fall months.

New to the Ta-Hoe Nalu this summer is the Ta-Hoe Nalu Stand Up Paddleboard Experience, which invites beginners to learn how to paddle from an elite athlete and then go on a guided tour with them. A $30 fee per person includes demo board, paddle instruction, guided tour, event T-shirt and lunch ticket.

For more information about the event, go online.

S. Tahoe council pushes back on vacation rental changes

By Kathryn Reed

Normally when anything having to do with vacation rentals is on the South Lake Tahoe City Council agenda, the room is packed, emotions run high and colorful descriptions of tourists' antics are relayed.

June 7 was a little different.

Council members and the public were a bit miffed to know nothing about the proposed changes until the agenda was released late last week. And then the council was not eager to pass what staff brought forward.

Vacation rentals run the gamut in Lake Tahoe.

When Councilmember Bruce Grego asked Community Police Officer Bob Albertazzi if anyone had asked him to rewrite the ordinance, he said no. All he was tasked to do was make administrative changes so all issues except the transient occupancy tax came under the purview of the police chief.

Albertazzi explained while he was in the ordinance he came across things he thought should be changed – like eliminating the need to post the sign on each vacation rental, how parking is handled, and putting a fixed number on how many people can ever be in a vacation rental.

Councilwomen Claire Fortier and Angela Swanson admitted their children might have been at one of those vacation rentals when the senior class at South Tahoe High School had a party. They would have been violating the rules if Albertazzi had his way.

He had proposed the limit be double the number of people allowed to sleep at a rental.

Mostly the council did not like what Albertazzi proposed. They asked for staff to bring back another proposal in two weeks, at the June 21 meeting. Councilman Tom Davis recused himself from the discussion because of his ownership in the Tahoe Keys Resort.

The vacation rental ordinance has been around since 2003. It's been tweaked at different times.

Jim Morris, president of Lake Tahoe Accommodations, spoke at Tuesday's meeting, saying what the city really should be looking into is vacation rentals by owners not collecting transient occupancy tax. He contends the city is losing out on a half million dollars a year on the rentals not paying the tax.

All rentals are supposed to apply for vacation home rental permit. Then they are supposed to collect the appropriate tax.

Individual property owners don't need a business license for this. Property managers, though do.

This is a list of the 1,239 vacation rentals the city has on record.

In other action:

• South Tahoe is continuing its agreement with Lake Tahoe Unified School District for the 2011-12 school year to have an officer at the school act as the school resource officer. The district will reimburse the city about $52,105 a year for an officer to be on the campus.

• The council approved the city's Business Plan – the first of its kind. This gives the city an action plan to carry out the Strategic Plan that was approved earlier this year.

• Delayed the workshop on the sign ordinance until June 21.

• Agreed to keep the Latino Affairs Commission at five members unless that commission asks to increase its board. Only five people applied for the position last go-round. One commissioner, at least, believes it should be expanded to seven members. The City Council wants that commission to think about expanding its representation to all ethnicities so it is more of a cultural affairs group.

• Heard a presentation from Sue Rae Irelan of the California Tahoe Conservancy about the South Tahoe Greenway bike trail. Mayor Hal Cole had to recuse himself because the CTC is seeking a right-of-way for the route to go through his property.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Check out where *Sunset* magazine thinks people should be putting their head at night in the Tahoe-Truckee area.

• Weather — as in all that snow — has pushed the 55th annual Tevis Cup Western States Trail Ride in Placer County from July 16 to Oct. 8.

• Reno's Pancake Laboratories' Facebook app ShortStack is featured in this month's issue of *INC* magazine. The app allows businesses to create customized Facebook tabs.

• June 23 from 11am-4pm TAMBA, Big Blue Adventure and the U.S. Forest Service are hosting a trail workday to begin construction on a singletrack connector trail above Tahoe City. More info is online.

• Tahoe Rim Trail Association has weekly trail building days: Daggett Summit on Tuesdays and Saturdays through Oct. 15, and Rim to Reno on Thursdays and Saturdays July 16-Oct. 15.

• Lakeside Beach Grill (4108 Lakeshore Blvd., South Lake Tahoe) is having a fundraiser from 3-9pm June 8 for the Tahoe Tallac Association and the 2011 Valhalla Art and Music Festival. Tickets are $45.

Should the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency be dissolved or the Compact rewritten? Why? And what would you change?

Bucket list of state parks to see before they close

By Dixie Reid, Sacramento Bee

California’s State Parks face an uncertain future. Because of budget cuts, Gov. Jerry Brown has proposed closing as many as 70 historic sites, beaches and recreation areas by July 2012.

If it happens, Californians no longer will have access to some of the state’s most cherished treasures, such as the Governor’s Mansion in Sacramento, a great fishing spot at Brannan Island and the enormous gold nugget on display at a Mariposa museum.

Here is a list of 15 must-see parks from the governor’s “hit list” and the reasons they should be on everyone Californian’s must-visit list during the next 13 months.

Be aware that services in some parks already have been reduced. For details on any site in the California State Parks system, go online.

Read the whole story

Nevada bear hunt opponents file lawsuit

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Opponents of Nevada’s first black bear hunt filed a lawsuit Tuesday in effort to block it.

The complaint, filed in Carson City District Court, seeks an injunction to prevent a hunt now scheduled to commence the third Saturday of August. Up to 20 bears could be killed by hunters under a proposal unanimously approved by the Nevada Wildlife Commission last December.

The suit contends the hunt illegally violated state administrative procedures due to insufficient noticing of December’s hearing. It also contends the hunt fell under a January executive order by Republican Gov. Brian Sandoval that froze proposed regulations by state agencies, said Christine

Schwamberger, an attorney representing the group NoBearHuntNV.org.

Read the whole story

Elementary science project saving Reno Aces money and water

By Lenita Powers, Reno Gazette-Journal

The science project of a 9-year-old Reno student has helped the Reno Aces ballpark save tens of thousands of gallons of water and could help homeowners cut their water bills as well.

Mason Perez's discovery of a simple way to conserve water began with a messy hot dog.

Mason was only 7 when he was at an Aces game with his mother, Stacy, in 2009.

After eating a hot dog, his hands and face were covered with ketchup and relish, so they went to one of the bathrooms to wash up.

"The water was coming out of the faucet so hard that I pulled my hands away," said Mason, a student at High Desert Montessori School. "I said, 'Mom, ouch, that's too hard.' So she leaned over and turned the valve down."

It was Mason's version of Sir Isaac Newton's observation of the falling apple. But instead of resulting in the theory of gravity, Mason theorized that reducing water pressure by turning the water supply valves to bathroom and kitchen sinks only halfway on could conserve water.

Mason’s mother said construction workers leave those valves fully open to allow air and sediment to drain out, but businesses and homeowners don’t think about partially closing them to save water.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Sandoval was correct to adjust to ‘new reality’

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the June 7, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

Gov. Brian Sandoval got it exactly right when he explained his reversal on a handful of tax increases that were due to sunset next month: “I felt that I had to deal with a new reality.”

“I know that some people perceive that as I broke my promise,” the governor told the Associated Press’ Sandra Chereb on Friday. “I think that’s an oversimplification of what I had to deal with.”

The possibility of “a new reality” is precisely why a candidate for public office shouldn’t make the kind of promise that Sandoval and others, including those lawmakers who also found themselves backtracking in recent days, made during the campaign on taxes.

Sandoval pledged during the campaign that there would be no new taxes, no tax or fee increases and no extension of some tax increases approved at a 2010 special session of the

Legislature to help the state weather a fiscal emergency.

That fiscal emergency continues today, and even Sandoval and his staff understood that the resulting budget would be devastating to the state. That's why they resorted to the budget gimmicks – taking money from school district construction reserves, for instance, or taking 9 cents per $100 of assessed valuation from the counties – that caused so much trouble when the Nevada Supreme Court said that the state couldn't help itself to other government agencies' money.

Read the whole story

S. Tahoe employee benefits may be decided by voters

By Kathryn Reed

Voters may have a chance to weigh-in on what they think employees in South Lake Tahoe should get when it comes to pensions and health care benefits.

An idea broached by Mayor Hal Cole earlier this spring came before the full council Tuesday. The five agreed if the necessary concessions the city needs from its seven bargaining units aren't achieved, the issues will go to the voters in February – when the presidential primary takes place.

In 2002-03, South Tahoe paid $1.1 million into the California Public Employees Retirement System. That figure is expected to increase to $4.7 million for the 2011-12 fiscal year.

While City Attorney Patrick Enright was quick to not single out South Lake Tahoe, saying other cities are in the same boat, he did point out employees in many other cities are making concessions, and where they aren't, that particular city is trying to take the upper hand.

The more than four time increase to PERS is the result of bad investments, more retirees and an increase in benefits for some retirees.

Most South Tahoe employees don't contribute a dime to their retirement. The city is paying its share as well as the employees'. It wasn't until a couple years ago public safety started paying a small percentage.

The employee share to CalPERS is 8 to 9 percent.

When Councilman Tom Davis, who was on the council for 12 years before being elected again in November, asked, "Why are we paying the 9 percent?" Enright said, "Because we agreed to it."

The "we" is actually the council. They make all the final decisions when it comes to voting on salary and benefits packages for rank and file employees.

But that 9 percent is just a pittance of what the city pays for employee pensions.

The city's share for tier 1 fire employees in 2010-11 is 40.91 percent and will grow to 47.62 percent for 2011-12.

That means the city is paying more than 50 percent of a firefighters' salary into the retirement system.

This type of compensation is similar for all employees in the city.

So, if someone has a salary of $60,000 – the city is paying another $30,000-plus into their retirement.

It has changed, though, to where there are two other tiers, meaning new hires don't have it so cushy. Tier 3 firefighters this fiscal year have the city paying 17.36 into PERS and 22.19 percent for next fiscal year.

"Assume they retire at 50 and assume they live to 80, they will be paid out by the city for 30 years, when they worked 25, so they get more paid to them in retirement than they did on the job," City Manager Tony O'Rourke said after the meeting of most employees. "And they are guaranteed cost of living adjustments."

Public employees are guaranteed a set retirement figure based on years worked and their last highest salary.

This compares to the private sector that may rely on a 401(k) – which is not something employers have to offer – and Social Security. The normal range for an employer contribution to a 401(k) is 3 percent to 7 percent. Then the employee must also deal with the fluctuations of the stock market. Sometimes they have few if any options for where the money is invested.

On the public sector side it didn't matter that CalPERS lost 30 percent in the market one year. Cities had to make up those losses. Cities is the same as taxpayers. The employees saw no loss, felt no financial burden.

Eleven percent of South Lake Tahoe's general fund goes to pension expenses, while another 18 percent is for employee health care.

As those costs rise, it cuts into basic services – like roads, upgrades to software that would allow the city to operate more efficiently, repairs to equipment that might put more snowplows on the road or even allow more employees to be hired to assist residents.

Also on the private sector side is Social Security. In the recent past, employees contributed 6.2 percent of their wages to Social Security. For 2011, that has dropped to 4.2 percent. Employers still pay 6. 2 percent. Self-employed people pay the combined amount.

When it comes to health benefits, anyone hired by South Lake Tahoe prior to 2008 who works for 25 or more years will receive health benefits for free for the rest of their lives upon retiring. So will their dependents.

It costs the city $1.9 million a year for the 130 retirees – a dollar amount that grows each year. The city pays about $15,000 per year on each retiree for health benefits. Of the city's retirees, 58 percent don't cough up a penny for health benefits.

On average, employees pay 4.6 percent of their health care costs, while the city is picking up 95.4 percent.

Even Councilwoman Claire Fortier chimed in how her monthly paycheck for being on the council amounted to about $1,000, while the health benefits were about $9,000. Though she didn't elaborate what time period this was for.

In the private and public sectors, the employer and employee each pay 1.45 percent of the employees' wage for Medicare.

South Lake Tahoe spends 78 percent of its general fund on employee related expenses. In the five-year budget plan that was adopted earlier this year, that percentage is slated to drop to 74.

To get there, the city is asking employees to change their contract. The miscellaneous/public works employees' contract is up this fall, while the other six expire in a little more than a year.

Jere Copeland, who represents some of the unions, said June 7, "The best route is to bargain with your unions."

While that was the overriding sentiment of the council, they still took the step to place the CalPERS and health care contributions on the February ballot if the unions don't come through as needed.

For the 2011-12 budget, the council is banking on $1.5 million in employee concessions. If that doesn't happen, more jobs and more services will be cut.

Meeting between city staff and employee groups are scheduled this month.

If the two sides don't come to an equitable agreement, then language will be drafted for voters to decide what city employees should get for compensation regarding benefits. If the unions don't agree to it, the city has the power to impose the will of the voters.

Ex-Block owner expected be in S. Tahoe jail by end of June

Eneliko "Sean" Smith, who is in custody on DUI charges in Las Vegas, waived extradition June 6. He should be in South Lake Tahoe by the end of the month.

Local officials want him because he has failed to pay the city what its owed based on a court settlement from delinquent transient occupancy taxes.

Eneliko
Smith

Smith had been operating the now defunct Block hotel and Cedar Lodge in the Stateline area.

The Block is owned by BMR Funding LLC and the Cedar Lodge is now owned by First Credit Bank.

The city has liens on both property for delinquent TOT. When either site is sold, the city would get its money when the title is transferred. This is in addition to what the court has ordered Smith to pay.

— *Kathryn Reed*