Poll: Not many interested in Tour of California

Weekend poll results from the *Sacramento Bee*.

Where will you watch the Amgen Tour of California?

• Lake Tahoe area: 8 percent

• As it heads toward Sacramento: 18 percent

• Auburn: 6 percent

• TV coverage on VS: 14 percent

• Not interested: 54 percent

Total votes: 181

– Joe Davidson, Sacramento Bee

Power out in South Tahoe for 3-plus hours

South Lake Tahoe residents probably woke to flashing alarm clocks Monday morning.

This is because the power was out from 12:08 to 3:29am.

It affected about 24,000 customers.

Liberty Energy officials said the problem started with NV Energy's Buckeye substation in Carson City. The Buckeye Substation delivers power to two Liberty Energy substations –

one at Meyers and the other at Round Hill. Therefore, South Lake Tahoe, Woodfords and Markleeville customers were out of power until NV Energy was able to restore delivery of power to through their Buckeye substation.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority has a mobile phone app out called Tahoe South. Features include events calendar, outdoor recreation, activities, weather and road conditions, accommodations, businesses direct calling and GPS-enabled mapping that detects current locations to the nearest facilities.

• Caesars Entertainment, which owns Harrah's and Harveys in Lake Tahoe, rolled out a loyalty rewards program for incentive and meeting planners based on its Total Rewards loyalty program for gaming clients. This is the first program like this in the gaming industry.

• Father-daughter duo Dan Schwartz and Tawny Stanton have joined the Chase International Incline Village real estate office.

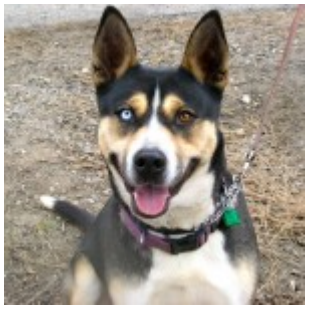
• Northstar-at-Tahoe Resort hired Davy Ratchford as director of marketing.

• Anyone interested in the aquatic invasive species forum from April can view the Youtube videos and some presentation PDFs here or visit the Tahoe RCD Youtube channel.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe

Gypsy is a sweet 4 year old shepherd-husky mix.

She came to the shelter from a home where she lived with lots of other dogs. She is very affectionate with people. She is sometimes a little unsure about other female dogs, so she'd need to meet yours before going home.



Gypsy is about 60 pounds, and has lots of energy. She would do best in a home where she would get exercise every day. As with most huskies, she can jump many fences and so must have a well fenced yard.

And look at those beautiful eyes.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

California considers shortening school year

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

Children in frigid areas have “snow day” school closures. Could students across sunny California face “budget days” in bad fiscal times?

Gov. Jerry Brown and school officials warn that shutting down school one month early – 20 instructional days – is a real possibility for the next school year without an extension of higher taxes. Some see Hawaii, which slashed 17 days in 2009-10, as an example that drastic measures are possible.

But there remain significant hurdles to imposing a monthlong closure in California, particularly getting approval from teachers unions and lawmakers. Republicans suggest that Democrats are raising the possibility as a scare tactic.

In the past two years, most California school districts have reduced their schedules below the 180-day calendar that was standard here in the previous decade and remains the norm nationwide.

No legislative proposal exists, but Orange County Superintendent of Schools William Habermehl said his 27 districts are talking about the option, whether it means a shorter school year or four-day weeks.

Read the whole story

North Shore ready for boating season

North Tahoe Public Utility District has expanded hours at the North Tahoe Regional Park from 7am-7:30pm.

Beginning June 1, the park hours will close at 9pm.

To maintain the park, stay off turf areas until they have dried.



Construction will start again at the new playground in the park once the area has dried out enough for work to commence.

The boat launch at Tahoe Vista Recreation Area will open on May 23. The launch will be open from 7am-7pm. The restrooms will be open by May 15.

Coon Street Boat Launch will open for the season May 26 from 9am-5pm Thursday through Monday; closed Tuesday and Wednesday. The restrooms will be open by May 15.

Both launches will be staffed in compliance with the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency’s Blue Boating and Aquatic Invasive Species Inspections and all boats being launched must have the proper documentation prior to launching. When no staff is present, the launches will be closed and locked.

Opinion: Alternatives to foreclosure

By Deborah McNaughton

Foreclosure filings spiked upward another 7 percent in March. There are alternatives consumers can use to avoid becoming part of next month's statistic.

During March, the amount of foreclosure filings totaled 239,745, according to statistics released from RealtyTrac. This is up from February, when filings totaled 225,101. Granted, the rate of increase is slower than it was this time last year, but that the decrease wasn't attributable to better market conditions.

The slowdown is because there are so many foreclosures to file, it's taking lenders longer to process foreclosure proceedings. The allegations of fraud in some of these foreclosure proceedings started last September, and as a result, there was a temporary suspension of foreclosures while the fraud was investigated. There are people out there who are still in trouble, but there are ways they can avoid a foreclosure, if they're willing to do the work.

My alternatives include:

* Short Sale – Of course you have considered a short sale. That should be your first choice, but the downside is that there are so many players in the mix. First, you have to list the property with a real estate company. If you get a buyer, you have to submit a hardship letter and your financials to the lender along with the offer to purchase your property at a price that is lower than your balance. It may take the lender weeks or months to decide if they are willing to accept the offer. By that time you may have lost your buyer. If you have not been making your mortgage payments, the lender may

foreclose on your property. Unless you can overcome these issues, this alternative may not be the one for you.

* Short Refinance – If your payments are not behind, contact a lender to see if you are eligible for a short refinance. An appraisal on the property will be ordered. If the appraisal is less than the balance you owe, the lender will tell you how much of a loan they will make. When you get a commitment letter and appraisal from the lender, submit it to your current lender requesting a reduction of your current balance. If they agree to a reduced payoff, continue with the new lender and complete your new loan with a lower loan amount and hopefully better terms.

* Lease Purchase Option – Put your home or property on the market as a lease with an option to purchase. A lease purchase allows a buyer to purchase your property for an agreed sales price and date to complete. Ernest money is applied towards a down payment, and you would collect monthly payments. Make sure you get enough down payment money to catch up any past due payments, and continue to make the mortgage payments until the sale is complete.

* Rental – Renting your house out may also be an option for you. If you get a renter that can cover your payments you can rent another place for less money. When things get better and your finances loosen up you can always move back into your home.

A lot more people are facing foreclosure than the statistics currently reflect. As a result, everyone should be aware of the alternatives. Foreclosure can sometimes be a worst-case scenario for some, but that can be avoided simply by choosing to accept something that isn’t a best-case scenario, but it’s better than losing your place to live with no alternatives at all.

Deborah McNaughton is a nationally recognized author, credit

expert and financial coach.

Habitat for Humanity meeting in South Lake

Habitat for Humanity “A Brush with Kindness” is having a volunteer informative meeting May 17 at 6:30pm at Hope Lutheran Church, 930 Julie Lane, South Lake Tahoe.

A Brush with Kindness is a nationwide program serving low-income homeowners to maintain the exterior of their home to include exterior painting, minor repairs, and landscaping.

For more information, call Carolyn at (530) 541.4654 or email sltatahoehabitat@gmail.com for more info.

Argo keeps proving he’s one of the guys on police force

By Kathryn Reed

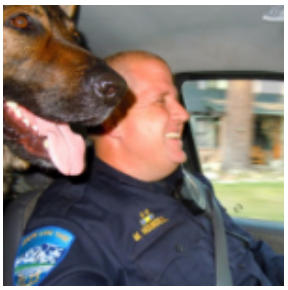
Pacing back and forth, head out the window trying to sniff out trouble.

Argo is ready to respond.

He is one of the newest officers in the South Lake Tahoe Police Department. In March, this German shepherd marked his first year working to patrol the streets with Officer Mark

Hounsell.

In some ways it would be hard to know Argo is a police dog if it weren't for him being in the back of a vehicle that says K9 unit. Like most dogs this time of year, he's shedding his winter coat. His tail wags as he's petted, looking up at the person with soft brown eyes asking why they took their hand away. Swimming in Lake Tahoe is one of his favorite things to do. Same with chasing the ball and playing tug-o-war with dad. And he'll bark at other dogs.



Argo and Officer Mark Hounsell drive around looking to defuse trouble. Photos/Kathryn Reed

But Argo, like all police dogs, is not ordinary based on having a job outside being a family pet – though that's also a big component of his life. (Hounsell and his wife have four children – newborn to 10 years.)

"He knows his place in the family. He listens to my wife," Hounsell says. "When it's time to work, he only listens to me."

Riding around with Argo and Hounsell, they get a lot of smiles. Hounsell admits Argo can defuse situations in many ways. In some instances having a dog around makes the officer

with a gun seem less threatening. Other times, people are more fearful of the dog than a man with a badge and bullets.

From March-December 2010 Argo has responded to:

• Alarms: 49

• Perimeter security: 7

• Public and school demonstrations: 12

• Building, area and article Searches: 4

• Major crimes (robberies/burglaries/fleeing felons/wanted suspects/ high-risk car stops): 13

• Other offenses: 5.

“He can clear a building more quickly than three or four officers,” Hounsell explained. “He’s a tool and he’s my partner.”

Argo has followed a scent for 2 miles, has been clocked running 17 mph, and sniffed out a rifle buried in a couple feet of snow. The latter was on his first day on the job.

“Dogs aren’t trained to tear apart a person. They are trained to hold,” Hounsell. Puncture wounds is all a suspect should sustain if a dog catches them. Now, if they try to free themselves from the canine, a different outcome is likely to ensue.

Hounsell calls Argo the people’s dog – after all it was $8,000 in donations and drug forfeiture money that paid for him. The city and South Lake Tahoe Police Canine Association own Argo. And it’s the city that pays for his food and vet bills.

Argo has a vest that will deflect a bullet and at least slow the blade of a knife. But he only has to wear the heavy armor when they are facing a known threat.

It’s Hounsell who brushes, bathes and feeds Argo.

Don’t worry about Argo getting too hot on a warm Tahoe day. The back of the vehicle is temperature controlled just in case it gets hot back there. All that seems to be missing is a comfy pillow for him to lie on. Instead, he wears a path on the rubber flooring as he goes from window to window.

Like Duke, who is partners with Officer Tony Broadfoot, Argo will be a narcotics dog one day. He’s in training for it now.

Training is a big part of Hounsell and Argo’s lives. Argo is POST certified for patrol through Adlerhorst International K9 Academy in Riverside. On a weekly basis he works with Jim Barnes, a retired El Dorado County deputy K9 handler. Barnes’ expertise has a large part to do with why Argo passed the three-day POST course.

Having come from the Czech Republic, Argo is multilingual. Hounsell is now, too. Argo responds to hand and verbal commands.

Bad guys shouldn’t feel safe with Hounsell out of the vehicle and Argo in the back. Argo knows how and when to provide backup.

The K9 trials are returning to South Lake Tahoe for the fourth year, Sept. 23-24. This is an opportunity for the public to see police dogs from multiple agencies compete. More information is online.

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Judge to consider releasing Garrido transcripts

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

Phillip and Nancy Garrido will be sentenced June 2 for the kidnapping and rape of Jaycee Lee Dugard, but that won't be the end of the case that day.

El Dorado Superior Court Judge Douglas Phimister has scheduled a hearing after the sentencing to decide whether to unseal the transcripts of Dugard's appearance before a grand jury last September.

Phimister agreed to hold the hearing in response to an April 29 request from the *Bee*. In a letter to the judge submitted on behalf of media organizations statewide, the *Bee* asked the judge to grant "access to the documents immediately upon the closure of this case."

Phimister previously rejected media attempts to gain access to the documents, saying they should remain sealed until the case is over.

District Attorney Vern Pierson has previously opposed release of the document, and Nancy Garrido's attorney, Stephen Tapson, has described their contents as evil and said they should never be opened.

Read the whole story