Big tournaments highlight Tahoe-Reno golf season

By Dan Hinxman, Reno Gazette-Journal

Northern Nevada golf fans who enjoy watching high-level competition are in for a treat this year.

The region will host four professional events, two celebrity events and a high-profile amateur tournament between June and October. And the two that have the biggest following – the PGA Tour's Reno-Tahoe Open and the American Century Championship celebrity tournament – won't be held on the same week as they were in 2010.

New to the area are two LPGA tournaments – Patty Sheehan & Friends, an LPGA Legends event hosted by Hall of Famer Patty Sheehan, and the Western Section LPGA T&CP Championship. Also making its first appearance in the region is the Pacific Coast Amateur, considered one of the most prestigious amateur tournaments in the country.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Detailing importance of S. Tahoe's General Plan

By Tony O'Rourke

On May 3, the South Lake Tahoe City Council will host a public hearing and work session on the city's General Plan update. On May 17, the City Council is scheduled to consider adopting the

General Plan update and final environmental impact report. This is an exciting time for the city as it nears completion of adopting the community's vision following a three-year process of gathering community input, developing ideas, evaluating environmental impacts and concerns and considering alternatives.


Tony O'Rourke

The city of South Lake Tahoe's 2030 General Plan update sets a new direction for how the community plans, manages, and implements change. The development of the General Plan update is based on the smart growth principles adopted by the City Council in 2005, the Sustainability Plan adopted by the City Council in 2008, as well as the community's vision as expressed in the draft Tahoe Valley Community Plan, Pathway 2007, many General Plan public workshops and community input during the process through comments and meetings.

In addition, the drafted General Plan and final environmental impact report includes environmental mitigation measures and an analysis of consistency with standards set by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency.

Why do we need a General Plan when we have the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and its Regional Plan?

Every city and county in California is legally required to adopt a General Plan, which serves as a community's constitution for land use and development. The TRPA sets land use policy on a regional scale, but doesn't include specific needs of a community and South Lake Tahoe is our community.

While a Regional Plan is important, its mission is to focus on lake clarity, regional developments and environmental thresholds. The city's General Plan goes a step further and focuses on South Lake Tahoe residents' vision, local needs and neighborhoods.

For example, in December 2010, local residents rated the appearance of South Lake Tahoe among the lowest in a national survey of 270 cities. The majority of the commercial corridor in South Lake Tahoe is deemed a protected "view corridor" to Lake Tahoe; yet the result of the regulations have left the visual appearance of the community below standard and in need of significant upgrade. While a billion dollars has been invested in lake clarity, which is still declining, the infrastructure and appearance of the city have been neglected.

What is and is not in the General Plan update?

Recently, special interest groups and individuals have written articles summarizing as purported "facts" things in the General Plan that are false and misleading. While the General Plan can be long and arduous reading, it is a public record so one need not argue about what is or is not contained in the plan. For the purpose of fact-setting the following is offered.

What is not in the General Plan:

• The General Plan does not contain a plan for 100 acres of six-story high-density development as asserted by uninformed sources.

• The city's General Plan does not envision thousands of new condominiums. Given the state of the housing market, it will be many years before the proposed 940 market rate residential housing unit allocations and 222 affordable housing residential allocations would be absorbed into the currently depressed housing market. Any new residential unit (which includes condominiums) requires an allocation of a residential

unit of rse (RUU) from the TRPA. The exception to the rule is for affordable housing units, which are restricted to low and moderate income households and do not require an RUU. If you read or hear otherwise, you are being given false or misleading information.

• The General Plan does not utilize eminent domain. The City Council adopted Resolution 2008-16 eliminating eminent domain authority from its purview.

What is in the General Plan:

• The plan focuses on sustainability and contains all policies included in the 2008 City Sustainability Plan. With adoption of the General Plan, the city will continue to be the leader in sustainable policy and practices within the Tahoe basin.

• The plan requires the city to promote "Complete Neighborhoods" that provide resident amenities, such as walking and biking trails and enhance neighborhood identity. These amenities have been suggested by special interest environmental groups as projects that would result in a better place to live and visit, which will provide great opportunities for collaboration.

• The plan requires incorporation of policies into community plans and an allowance of up to 70 percent land coverage on specifically-designated properties within areas that are already developed as higher density commercial hubs.

• The plan promotes removing worn and dilapidated buildings from existing commercial corridor into centralized hubs, which provides opportunity to improve the visual appearance of the city and reduce coverage in sensitive areas by centralizing it into non-sensitive areas. The General Plan requests up to an additional 386,000 square feet of commercial floor area to accomplish this goal.

The city is poised to take this opportunity to complete the

process of developing a 20-year vision for the future through adoption of a comprehensive General Plan. The City thanks the community for their input into the Plan. The City's General Plan Update and recently adopted Strategic Plan will help to ensure the beauty of our natural environment is not undermined by our built environment.

Tony O'Rourke is city manager of South Lake Tahoe.

Governments consider cuts to once off-limit pensions

By Michael Cooper and Mary Williams Walsh, New York Times

When an arbitrator ruled this month that Detroit could reduce the pensions being earned by its police sergeants and lieutenants, it put the struggling city at the forefront of a growing national debate over whether the pensions of current public workers can or should be reduced.

Conventional wisdom and the laws and constitutions of many states have long held that the pensions being earned by current government workers are untouchable. But as the fiscal crisis has lingered, officials in strapped states from California to Illinois have begun to take a second look, to see whether there might be loopholes allowing them to cut the pension benefits of current employees. Now the move in Detroit — made possible, lawyers said, because Michigan's constitutional protections are weaker — could spur other places to try to follow suit.

"These things do tend to be herd-oriented," said Sylvester J. Schieber, an economist and consultant who studies pensions.

The mayors of some hard-hit cities have said that the high costs of pensions have forced them to lay off workers: Oakland, Calif., laid off one-tenth of its police force last year after failing to win concessions on pension costs.

Read the whole story

Chopper replaces mechanical equipment for fuels reduction

By Kathryn Reed

If and when a fire erupts at the Y, a natural fuel break will have been established in the middle of South Lake Tahoe so it doesn't destroy the entire city.

That is the purpose of the nearly 50-acre fuel reduction project at Lake Christopher near Trout Creek and Pioneer Trail. It's the final project to create a break for when the next catastrophic fire strikes. Areas above and below have been treated in recent years.



A helicopter April 28 removes cut trees from the Lake

Christopher
area.
Photos/Kathryn
Reed

When the U.S. Forest Service gets around to its much talked about South Shore Hazardous Fuels Reduction Project, this part of the city that borders on the fed's property will have been treated.

Much of what is being cleared from this stream environmental zone looks like bad firewood. Not much of it is logs. A lot is slash. A few Jeffery pines are being removed, but mostly it's lodgepole because they love wet areas.

Men on the ground felled the trees with chain saws. Today is the third day pilot Matt Turner is using a helicopter to lift the debris to one of three landing areas.

"This way is better than pile burning," explained Dave Mercer, the contractor for the project. "There is going to be a little disturbance. People don't understand what a forest should look like."

He's out in the woods with his crew making sure everything is going according to plan. One eye is on the men securing the chokes to the piles of wood and another on the helicopter hovering above.

This method Mercer proposed means no big machines on the ground. So, even though the ground is not pristine because trees have been felled, it looks nothing like when skidders, harvesters and other equipment are used.

A few acres by South Tahoe Public Utility District headquarters will have mechanical means used to clear the area, but it's not in an SEZ.

With Lake Christopher being a stream zone and snow still on

the ground, it may never have been permitted if equipment had to be brought in. As it was, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency deferred the permitting process to the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board even though the memorandum of understanding between the agencies defers the permitting to TRPA. TRPA officials were not available to explain why they were unable to do their job and asked someone else to do so.

“TRPA wanted to pile burn,” Mercer said.

South Tahoe Fire Marshal Ray Zachau agrees with Mercer’s assessment about people not understanding what a healthy forest looks like. He hired a forester to plan this project for fuels reduction and creating a healthy forest.

“If we can keep a fire on the ground, we can put it out,” Zachau said. “Once it’s in the canopy, we really can’t stop it.”

Both men get an earful from people who don’t want any trees removed. But without fire coming through to naturally thin the forest, the stands are overgrown and create more of a threat. Plus, it’s not good for plant and animal species.

This $147,000 project is being funded by a Forest Service grant and money from the Southern Nevada Public Lands Management Act. The entire project is supposed to take about three weeks, with four to five days of flying.

Mercer isn’t sure what he’ll do with the chips. Some may stay in town for a construction site’s erosion control measures. Some may go to a cogeneration plant in Susanville.

There’s no money in selling this material – the market has dried up. It’s to the city’s benefit if the contractor could make money off the end product because then the bid would have come in lower.

Still, this type of removal is more economical than mechanized, according to Zachau.

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EPA proposes stricter rules on water pollution

By Juliet Eilperin, Washington Post

The Obama administration announced Wednesday that it will impose stricter pollution controls on millions of acres of wetlands and tens of thousands of miles of streams.

The new guidelines from the Environmental Protection Agency, which will be codified in a federal regulation later this year, could prevent the dumping of mining waste and the discharge of industrial pollutants to waters that feed swimming holes and drinking water supplies. The specific restriction will depend on the waterway.



Glass bottles strewn on the bank of the Upper Truckee River in summer 2010.

Photo/LTN file

The question of which isolated streams and wetlands qualify for protection under the Clean Water Act has been in dispute for a decade. The Supreme Court has issued two decisions, and the George W. Bush administration issued guidance in 2003 and 2008 limiting the scope of the act.

EPA Administrator Lisa P. Jackson said in a telephone news conference with reporters that although the new rules will expand the waterways enjoying federal protection, “this is not some massive increase, as far as we can tell.”

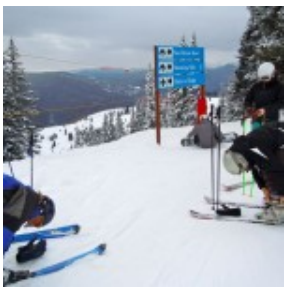
Read the whole story

Skier visits up 3.9% at Vail Resorts

By Ed Sealover, Denver Business Journal

Skier visits to Vail Resorts Inc. properties this season rose 3.9 percent over last year and lift-ticket revenue jumped 8 percent, according to final numbers released Thursday by the Broomfield-based company.

Vail Resorts also reported significant year-over-year increases in several areas of ancillary revenue: 9 percent for dining revenue, 8.4 percent for ski school revenue and 8.3 percent for retail and rental revenue.



Buckling up for Vail's bowls. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“The 2010-2011 ski season has come to a close and we are pleased with the ski season metrics across our six resorts,” Vail Resorts CEO Rob Katz said in a news release. “It was especially good to see the rate of growth in lift ticket and ancillary revenue continue to outpace skier visits due to price increases across our lift ticket and season pass products, together with increased spending per visit.”

Read the whole story

Bodies of 2 Tahoe area skiers found in Eastern Sierra

By Mike Rogge and Tim Mutrie, Powder

Overdue since late Tuesday from a ski mountaineering outing to Split Mountain, south of Bishop, the bodies of Kip Garre and Allison Kreutzen were discovered today during a search-and-rescue operation, Powder.com has confirmed.

Garre, 38, an accomplished skier, guide and mountaineer, and

his girlfriend, Allison Kreutzen, intended to climb the Split Couloir on April 26. They did not return. Both Garre and Kreutzen lived in the Tahoe area.

When reached via telephone by Powder.com this afternoon, Inyo County Sheriff's Office Public Information Officer Carma Roper said, "There was a search and rescue effort launched at 8 a.m. this morning. They were two very experienced hikers/skiers and they were overdue, near the Split Mountain area."

Roper later confirmed that two bodies had been discovered; Powder.com independently confirmed Garre and Kreutzen as the two skiers involved. "The wind situation right now is horrendous and the helicopters aren't able to get into certain areas that they should be able to," Roper added.

Seven of Garre's and Kreutzen's friends assisted in the search-and-rescue operation, according to Roper. Powder.com reached one of those skiers this evening, California time, just as they were making their way out of the mountains. That person declined to discuss details of the situation until first connecting with friends and family.

Garre grew up in Hancock, New Hampshire. Captivated by the freeskiing movement of the early 90s, Garre moved to Squaw Valley and was an early supporter in the park scene before shifting his focus to ski mountaineering and backcountry adventures. He made descents down some of the world's most elusive mountains, including in Kashmir, Pakistan, China, the Tetons, the Alps, Alaska, Antarctica and his beloved Sierra.

Read the whole story

Calif. joins quest to bring Olympics to Tahoe in 2022

By KCRA

The 2022 Winter Olympic Games are more than a decade away, yet a Sacramento group is already working on the pitch to bring the games to Lake Tahoe.

The California Winter Games Committee announced a partnership between political, business and community leaders to explore ways to attract the worldwide spectacle to the Sierra for the first time since Squaw Valley hosted the games in 1960.

The committee said bringing the Olympics to Lake Tahoe would bring enormous economic benefit to hub cities like Sacramento.

The California committee will join forces with the Reno-Tahoe Winter Games Coalition to promote both states as combined hosts.

“We believe California needs a strong statewide effort to match up with the knowledge and resources from Nevada to create a unique, carefully constructed and economically feasible plan,” said Michael Faust, interim president of the California Winter Games Committee.

Read the whole story

Tour de California permits in

hand; excitement mixed

By Kathryn Reed

Tour de California, the multi-day bike race that starts on the South Shore next month, can officially come to Tahoe. The Tahoe Regional Planning Agency approved the permits April 28.

However, the enthusiasm for the ride is dependent on who one listens to.



At a meeting of Heavenly Village folks on Tuesday they spoke of gearing up for the May 15 start. Flags touting the event are hanging from poles. A band has been secured to play that Sunday. A big screen will be erected near Fire + Ice so people can watch the cyclists as they lap the lake 1½ times. That will be going on from 10:30am-2:30pm. Food vendors are still being secured.

The city of South Lake Tahoe is providing 15 tents to nonprofit organizations that will be put up between Stateline and the Y.

“Those got snatched up really quick,” Lauren Thomaselli, South Lake Tahoe events coordinator, said.

Private businesses are planning to have parties – some invite only, some open to the public along Highway 50.

However, don’t expect Lake Tahoe Community College to be participating. When board member Karen Borges asked interim President Steve Maradian on Tuesday what LTCC was doing for Amgen, he smirked and had nothing good to say.

“It’s not going to be as robust as originally thought,” he said of the whole event. “It’s not coming together the way they wanted it to, including the publicity.”

Maradian said the college is not having a booth at the expo at Horizon because of the expense.

Information about the events leading up to the start and for the two days the cyclists are in Tahoe is online.

Open house at Austin’s House

Austin’s House is having an open house May 21 from 11am-3pm.

Austin’s House is located at 3589 North Sunridge Drive in Minden just one half mile east from the intersection of 395 and Jack’s Valley Road.

Food donations are greatly appreciated but not required to attend the open house.

Austin’s House is the only emergency children’s shelter in rural Northern Nevada. The children are placed at Austin’s House after being removed from their homes due to abuse or neglect. These children have no place else to go. Austin’s House provides the basic living necessities including proper nutrition, hygiene, rest, nurturing, recreation, companionship, education, and life skills training.

For more information, call (775) 267.6711.