Truckee chorus to put on spring pops performance

The Truckee Tahoe Community Chorus of Sierra College, directed by Susan K. Horst, Chris Nelson, and Thomas Acord, will present “Spring Pops Potpourri” at The Resort at Squaw Creek.

The chorus will be accompanied by the Diablo Valley College Philharmonic Orchestra from Pleasant Hill, directed by Owen J. Lee.

The “Pops” program will delight the young with selections as The Tortoise and the Hare and The Syncopated Clock; the comic opera buffs with Offenbach’s Neighbors’ Chorus, a musical jest: Italian Salad, and the not so young with some great choral literature. A fine finish for the menu of songs is a medley of Broadway show tunes by Kern, Bernstein, Sondheim, Wilson, Stein, Gershwin, and Loesser.

The concert, which celebrates spring through the lightness of popular music, is a great way to enjoy the season in the beautiful setting of the “Resort at Squaw Creek”.

Shows are April 30 at 7pm and May 1 at 2pm. Tickets are $15 for adults and can be purchased online, from chorus members, or at the door. Students and children are admitted free of charge.

Zombie to help launch book on

South Shore

Bona Fide Books and a special zombie guest will host a book launch for local graphic artist Jared Manninen on April 15 at 7pm in Meyers.

“Gruesome Tales to Tickle Your Terror Bone” is the first effort of Makoto Press. Written in the storytelling tradition of 1950s horror comics like EC Comics’ “Shock Suspense Stories” and “Tales from the Crypt” (with their signature “twist” endings), “Gruesome Tales” collects six short illustrated stories. It will be available for purchase for $20.



Jared Manninen

Manninen will be available for questions about the graphic novel process, and is also teaching a graphic novel course beginning April 16. Call Bona Fide Books for more information at (530) 573.1513.

Bona Fide Books is located at 1069 Magua St., No. 4, in Meyers behind the Getaway Café.

FAA’s reneging of 2-person mandate in towers not widely known

By Jason Hidalgo, Reno Gazette-Journal

A sleeping air traffic controller at the Reno-Tahoe International Airport on Wednesday revealed the Federal Aviation Administration reneged on its promise to have two controllers working overnight.

The incident made Reno the focal point of the continuing debate about the safety of the nation’s air traffic control system, just weeks after the FAA required two-person midnight crews at the Reno airport’s air traffic control tower and several others around the country. The agency is requiring two-person crews again after the Reno incident.

In a statement, Transportation Secretary Ray LaHood called what happened outrageous and “absolutely unacceptable.” U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev., agreed.

“My office has contacted the Federal Aviation Administration to make it clear that this situation is completely unacceptable and to request that there be a minimum of two air traffic control personnel in the tower at all times,” Reid said in a statement.

Late-night air control staffing at the airport initially was bumped to two people in late March after a couple of jetliners landed on their own at Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport when a lone controller fell asleep on the job. Previously, the air traffic control center had been staffed with just one person overnight.

But after several days, the FAA went back to one controller

several days later after implementing new landing protocols, FAA spokesman Ian Gregor said. – a change that wasn't widely known. It was not immediately clear why the change back to one person was made.

Read the whole story

Ski report: Fresh layer of snow



A little bit of fresh snow fell yesterday – though it's not quite a powder day.

Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

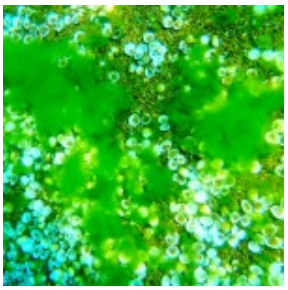
Agencies try to root out invasive species from Tahoe

By Max Neale

On April 5, the Lake Tahoe Aquatic Invasive Species Coordination Committee hosted its first Aquatic Invasive Species public forum at the U.S. Forest Service building in South Lake Tahoe. The event featured expert speakers from the

Tahoe Regional Planning Agency, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S. Department of Agriculture, UC Davis, and was facilitated by the Tahoe Resource Conservation District. Topics of discussion included AIS threats nationwide and basinwide, the latest research on Lake Tahoe AIS, past and upcoming control management efforts and upcoming changes to the watercraft inspection program.

Steve Chilton, Lake Tahoe and Northern Nevada AIS coordinator for the Fish and Wildlife Service, described AIS, such as the Asian clam and Eurasian water milfoil, as “a serious problem for Lake Tahoe, both ecologically and economically.” Chilton explained that in the United States AIS cause hundreds of millions of dollars in damage and control costs annually.



Elk Point Asian clam bed during a summer 2008 algal bloom. Photo/Provided

He cites Lake Mead as an example where the quagga mussel, first discovered there in 2007, has spread to nearly every corner of the lake and is now adversely affecting the valuable striped bass fishery. The goals of Lake Tahoe’s AIS Management Plan are to prevent new invaders and to monitor, control and eradicate those that currently exist.

Ted Thayer, manager of TRPA’s AIS program, presented on the history and structure of Lake Tahoe’s research and management

efforts. Thayer emphasized the wide reaching impacts of AIS, which have extensive economic, ecological, and social consequences. He also described the importance of Tahoe's collaborative approach to management, which involves more than 50 organizations and agencies working together to prevent and control AIS. The efficacy of this partnership was recently recognized with an award to commend the excellent work being done in the Tahoe basin to combat and prevent AIS from the U.S. Forest Service headquarters in Washington, D.C.

While last week's forum highlighted past successes, it also addressed the many challenges that currently face Lake Tahoe. Patrick Stone, senior wildlife biologist with TRPA, spoke to the history of aquatic plant invasions, current control methods, and the importance of the watercraft inspection program. "The [watercraft inspection] program is designed to stop all AIS from entering Lake Tahoe and also to prevent their spread within the Basin."

Ken Kasman, director of watercraft inspections at TRPA, further described the program as the way best way "to lower this risk of new invasions while still allowing access to the lake."

Watercraft inspection fees for the 2011 boating season will range from $30-$100, depending on vessel size. According to Kasman, inspection fees raise only 29 percent of the funds necessary to operate the inspection program. Federal funding from the Fish and Wildlife Service, state and private sources provide the majority share.

Several researchers, including Lars Andersen from the USDA, Geoff Schladow from the UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center, and Jay Rowan of the California Department of Fish & Game, outlined research projects for the 2011 field season. Highlights included two pilot projects for control of the Asian clam, a dye study to test the feasibility of aquatic herbicide use in the Tahoe Keys, and a project that aims to

reduce the populations of largemouth bass and bluegill, two species of warm water nonnative fish present in the Tahoe Keys.

During the public comment period several people and local business owners raised concerns about boat inspection protocols and the potential economic impact of a reduced bass fishery in the Keys.

A video of the event will be available at www.tahoercd.org. The next AIS public forum is scheduled for fall 2011. Sign up for the Tahoe RCD newsletter to stay informed.

Max Neale is an AmeriCorps member serving as the monitor/control coordinator at the Tahoe Resource Conservation District.

Broc's Puppy Store owner to be arraigned in May

By Kathryn Reed

The owner of the much-maligned and now defunct Broc's Puppy Store in South Lake Tahoe is scheduled to be arraigned May 16 in El Dorado County Superior Court.

Dennis Franks was in court this month. He was unable to continue to retain John Castellanos as his attorney, so a public defender may be appointed. However, with what may be a six-month trial, the court may pick another option when it comes to legal counsel because the staffing situation is such that one attorney could not devote that much time to one case, according to legal sources.



Franks is charged with 65 felony counts of grand theft by false pretense, 27 felony counts of forgery, one felony count of grand theft and a slew of misdemeanor charges.

During the short time the pet store was open numerous complaints were filed, Animal Control raided the shop, customers complained of buying sick dogs – some of which died, and others called it a puppy mill.

According to El Dorado County Assistant District Attorney Hans Uthe, Franks is blaming his now-deceased father for his problems. The elder Franks died about three weeks ago.

Franks is out on his own recognizance. Uthe said if he thought Franks would set up another store like Broc's, he would have insisted a bail amount be set before he could have gotten out of jail.

It is possible based on scheduling the case will be moved to Placerville.

The South Lake Tahoe and Carson City Broc's stores closed in April 2010.

Marijuana college gives students a higher education

By Jason Motlagh, Time

On the second floor of the downtown campus, a motley group of students listens to a lecture titled "Palliative and Curative

Relief Through a Safe and Effective Herbal Medicine." Not the sexiest of topics on the face of it, but there's a catch: this is Oaksterdam University, and the medicine being discussed is marijuana. At "America's first cannabis college," in Oakland, Calif., the sallow-faced hippy-skater types that one expects to find sit beside middle-aged professionals in business attire, united in their zeal for the pungent green leaf. No one dares speak out of turn, until instructor Paul Armentano, a marijuana-policy expert, cites a news report that U.S. antidrug authorities plan to legalize pot's active ingredient exclusively for drug companies' use. "More stinking profits for Big Business," mumbles a young man wearing a baseball cap. His classmates groan in agreement.

More than 17,000 students have enrolled since Oaksterdam opened in late 2007. The original student body numbered fewer than two dozen people. Most are from the U.S., but others have arrived from as far as Iran and Colombia to get training for the lucrative medical-marijuana industry. The concept itself originated in Amsterdam, where school founder Richard Lee visited a community-focused cannabis college and figured he could do the same in the Bay Area. A professional and transparent approach, he reasoned, could help erode the drug's stigmas and eventually move the state closer to full legalization. Some alums have taken up his activist mantle, campaigning aggressively last year in favor of a statewide proposition to legalize and tax recreational cannabis. (It failed by an 8-point margin.) (See pictures of the marijuana-growing industry.)

Still, faculty members concede the vast majority of new students are aspiring entrepreneurs with money on their mind. Oakland has some of the country's laxest drug laws, making it ground zero for the medical-marijuana boom. Small pot clubs abound. In 2009, four legal commercial-scale dispensaries approved by the city council sold some $28 million worth of the drug. The question most frequently asked of instructors?

“How much will this plant yield,” says “Big” Mike Parker, a technician in the horticulture lab with a long white beard and fading skull tattoos on his wrists. “This is hard work – you see me sweating,” he adds, tending to his plants under the bluish glow of a metal-halide light. “And if you think you’re gonna get rich, you’re here for the wrong reason.”

True to one of its sundry nicknames, cannabis is a weed that grows like one in the right climate. But given the gray area that now exists between state law – which allows regulated production for medical purposes – and federal laws that still prohibit the drug, discretion dictates that plants must be grown indoors. That’s no easy task. During a recent class, instructor Chris McCatheran broke down the risks of overfertilization, offering tips on what combination of nutrients is best and how to maintain the right parts-per-million ratio. Growing cannabis plants indoors is clearly a delicate affair, even if the feds don’t storm in and shut you down. (See photos of the hazy world of cannabis culture.)

Illegal pot farming has run rampant across Oakland. And although busts are still pretty rare, advocates fear that could change if public health and safety concerns mount as cultivation-related crime continues to rise. According to the Oakland police, in 2008 and 2009 there were eight reported robberies, seven burglaries and two homicides connected to the business. (Last year’s statistics are likely to be worse but are not yet available.) Meanwhile, the amount of fires doubled in 2010, largely the result of shoddy electrical wiring in illicit grow houses. On March 2, a warehouse believed to contain between 300 and 500 pot plants – many times the legal limit, if it had a permit – went ablaze in the western part of the city. It required 18 firefighters to put it out.

This is just the kind of Wild West behavior that Oaksterdam faculty and students insist they are trying to eliminate. “There’s still a chance that the police might kick down your door, but you’re taught to be responsible here and you get the

best instruction," says Lisa, 40, a food caterer by day who grows for a cooperative on the side. She drove three and a half hours from Lake Tahoe on a Saturday morning to attend an advanced class and says she can make up to $3,000 extra a month from her plants, a substantial sum but hardly windfall profits.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe officers recognized for DUI enforcement

Mothers Against Drunk Driving and the Office of Traffic Safety recently awarded several Northern California officers for their efforts in reducing the carnage caused by drunken drivers in their respective communities. Among those awarded were South Lake Tahoe Police Officers Justin Brock and Chris Webber.

Sixty-three DUI arrests were made by these two officers in 2010, 35 by Brock and 28 by Webber.

A total of 215 DUI arrests were made by the South Lake Tahoe Police Department last year.

So far this year, 77 drunken drivers have been arrested by South Lake Tahoe police officers.

According to Office of Traffic Safety statistics, there were 30,000 fatalities from drunken driving nationwide in 1980. That number was drastically reduced to 10,839 fatalities by 2009, due in large part to increased law enforcement efforts,

and education through organizations such as MAD. Still, on average, another DUI related fatality occurs every 50 seconds on the nation's roadways.

Lahontan board on road to allow chemicals in Lake Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Milfoil is a problem weed that will be allowed to continue to flourish in 2011. But 2012 could be a different story.

On Wednesday night the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board heard a presentation on the Pesticide Basin Plan Amendment that would allow chemicals to be used on a limited basis in Lake Tahoe to eradicate aquatic invasive species.

The rules currently on the books are being violated because the water board knows vector control is spraying for mosquito abatement in the Lake Tahoe Basin. In the southern part of the state, which Lahontan has jurisdiction over, water purveyors are applying chemicals.



Milfoil has been a problem in Lake Tahoe since the

1980s.
Photo/TRCD

Bringing people into compliance is not the driving force behind creating the amendment, but a bonus.

The reason staff believes the amendment is needed is for public health and safety, as well as ecological preservation. Environmental scientists Dan Sussman and Mary Fiore-Wagner made the presentation to the board at the April 13 meeting at Lake Tahoe Community College. (The two-day meeting resumes this morning at 8:30 at LTCC in South Lake Tahoe.)

“The long-term benefits to the environment outweigh the impacts of allowing some degradation to occur,” Fiore-Wagner said.

Ten people spoke during the public hearing – mostly in favor of using pesticides and herbicides. However, most were also from the Tahoe Keys area of South Lake Tahoe, which has had an issue with milfoil clogging the canals for decades.

The Keys contingent said the problem with mechanically getting rid of milfoil is that it keeps growing back – much like mowing a lawn. Plus, the invasive aquatic species grows in warm areas like the Keys (and Emerald Bay).

Jeff Pylman, Nevada County agricultural commissioner, said he liked staff’s proposed tiered approach to the process.

“A lot of pesticides have been so robust they rise to the level you need pesticides to eradicate them,” Pylman said.

The idea is not to universally allow the application of pesticides or herbicides in Lahontan’s jurisdiction, but instead put the applicant through a rigorous process to convince staff and the board that this alternative is the only way to get ride of the harmful species and that the long-term benefits outweigh living with the status quo.

The Tahoe Area Sierra Club and League to Save Lake Tahoe each wrote letters this week to Lahontan saying what a horrible idea the amendment is.

“The long-term impacts are unknown and the public benefit is unknown. This is an experiment with no limits,” the Sierra Club wrote.

Neither group had a representative at the meeting.

Also in opposition, but who attended the meeting and spoke, was Madonna Dunbar, executive director of the Tahoe Water Suppliers Association.

Her group represents the entities around the lake that use Lake Tahoe as a drinking water source.

She pointed out that of the 160,000 water purveyors in the United States, 60 have received exemptions from the EPA saying they don’t have to filter the water. Six of those are part of her group. Dunbar fears allowing chemicals into the lake will jeopardize that status.

Board Chairman Jack Clarke is sensitive to her concerns, but overall believes the amendment “is a step in the right direction.”

Executive Director Harold Singer added, “We wouldn’t want to do something and the EPA pulls the exemption.”

Staff has time to investigate that issue. Another public hearing will be at the May 11 meeting in Victorville. People have until May 13 to comment on the amendment. More information about the amendment can be found online.

The Lahontan board is expected to vote on the amendment at the October meeting. It it’s approved, it would go to the state board in March 2012, to the Office of Administrative Law the next month, and be before the EPA in June.

Fitch Ratings lists LTUSD as stable

Fitch Ratings has affirmed Lake Tahoe Unified School District's general obligation bonds as follows:

• $25.3 million outstanding GOs, Election of 1999, series A and B, and GO refunding bonds, series 2002 and 2005 at 'AA-'.

The rating outlook is stable.

Rating rationale:

• The AA rating reflects the district's currently sound financial operations, exhibited by a good financial cushion, prudent actions to reduce expenditures, projections for balanced financial operations by fiscal 2013, and a good degree of remaining expenditure flexibility.

• These financial strengths are tempered by the expected cessation of one-time federal revenues in fiscal 2012, a challenged state funding environment, somewhat stretched labor relations, and years of significant enrollment declines.

• The tourism-driven local economy shows signs of weakness, including a large 7.2 percent assessed valuation decline, high area unemployment, below average income levels, and a challenged housing market.

• The district's debt profile is good overall, with low debt levels, no OPEB liability, and limited capital needs. However, amortization is slow.

Key rating drivers:

• The district’s unreserved financial cushion is sound, and Fitch expects management would sufficiently offset potential state revenue declines to maintain its financial cushion at adequate levels.

• The local economy is showing signs of weakness, and could weaken further from current levels in the near term, with potential secondary effects on enrollment and the tax base.

The district’s financial position is sound overall. According to the district’s second interim report, fiscal 2011 general fund operations are projected to produce a $1.2 million deficit, lowering the total and unreserved general fund balances to an adequate $1.8 million (5.1 percent of expenditures and transfers out). However, the district has resources available outside of the general fund that raise the total financial cushion to good levels. As with most school districts in the state, Lake Tahoe USD must contend with the expected cessation of one-time federal revenues in fiscal 2012 and a potentially significant state funding reduction. However, the board has already approved a two-year expenditure reduction plan to offset these declines, which nonetheless relies in part on needed labor concessions, and the district’s multi-year projections include conservative assumptions that could cause actual operations to out-perform current expectations. Further, the district has a good degree of remaining expenditure flexibility, including low class sizes that could be raised, and teaching days well in excess of the legal minimum. As such, the district is well positioned to weather anticipated revenue declines through fiscal 2013.

Additional information is available online.