North Shore's first LEED built home on the market

It's one thing to approach a building project with environmentally responsible intentions, however it's quite another thing to have the entire home built according to the exacting standards of LEED, an internationally recognized green building certification system.

The latter is exactly what an Incline Village builder/Realtor couple accomplished with the construction of the first LEED registered home on Lake Tahoe's North Shore, which is now on the market for $2.3 million.

Jeff Miller, president of Advance Design and Construction Inc. and K.J. Miller, a Chase International Realtor, put together a "Green Dream Building Team" with more than 20 national and local manufacturer and trade partners.

"The building techniques we utilized on the Green Dream Home are the future for residential construction, energy conservation and respect for the environment that are fast becoming a major consideration for home buyers" Jeff Miller said in a statement.

Located on Mill Creek Road, just a short walk to Incline beach, this 3,748-square-foot, four bedroom, 4.5 bath home is a living textbook of sustainable materials and building practices. Green technology is evidenced in the home's framing, roofing, foundation insulation, as well as its heating and cooling systems, plumbing, windows and doors and even the paints and stains. The home has an energy monitoring panel which allows the home owner to see exactly how much energy he is consuming on an hourly, daily and monthly basis.

"The state of Nevada now requires a home energy audit form be filled out in order to sell a home in this state. With a LEED

certified home, this is a no-brainer," K.J. Miller said.



The exterior. Photos/Matt Walco/Lake Tahoe Digital Productions



Living area of Incline Village house.



An open kitchen offers connection to the living area.

Opinion: Teachers must be evaluated by what students learn

By Doug Lasken and Bill Evers

Students in California public schools are not achieving at the levels they should. Too many students are unprepared for jobs or have to take remedial courses when they start college. In California, we judge student achievement through student scores on statewide tests. These tests assess how much students know about subject-matter content that is specified in an official set of state academic-content standards. Research has long shown that effective teachers are among the best ways to bring up student achievement. But in order to improve teaching effectiveness, it is helpful to know where the challenges are.

We've heard a lot in California recently about the move to factor student test scores from statewide standards-based tests into teacher evaluations. Yet did you know that for more than a decade, it has been the law in California to do just that?

If you are a typical teacher, school administrator, school reformer or parent, you'll be surprised indeed to hear about Education Code 44662. This decade-old law says that the governing board of each school district "shall evaluate and assess" teacher performance, if possible, using the state-adopted academic-content standards "as measured by" state-adopted "criterion referenced" tests. The law says "shall," not "may" – i.e., it is required.

The standards in question are the California Academic Standards, which detail the knowledge and skills that children from kindergarten through high school are supposed to master at each grade level. Once a year, students in grades two through 11 take the California Standards Tests. These tests measure mastery of the subject-matter content listed in the standards, grading the students' achievement at various performance levels.

And the results of these tests are required by law to be factored into teacher assessment. Yes, that's right: It is already the law that teachers must be evaluated using scores on tests that are standards based and criterion-referenced.

Doug Lasken is a retired English teacher and debate coach, who worked in the Los Angeles Unified School District. Bill Evers is a research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution and member of the institution's Koret Task Force on K-12 Education. Evers served as U.S. assistant secretary of education from 2007 to 2009.

Read the whole story

Dates set for annual Tahoe food-wine fest

The 26th annual Lake Tahoe Autumn Food and Wine Festival is Sept. 9-11 at the Village at Northstar in Truckee.

Back bigger and better than ever, culinary aficionados and hungry travelers will return to the Village at Northstar for chef battles, free outdoor grilling demonstrations, celebrity

chef luncheon, gourmet marketplace vendor fair, grape stomp, wine walk, art and sculpture exhibit, winemaker dinners, live entertainment, along with food and wine pairing seminars. Most events are outside.

Tickets go on sale in July.

Pets may not be ill, stress could be the issue

By Paul McCutcheon

You might not realize it, but if Fluffy or Skippy are listless, disobedient and getting sick all the time, chances are your pet doesn't have some mysterious disease —- he or she may simply be stressed out.

A lot of people think that stress is something that only affects humans, but it's a very real threat to the health and happiness of their pets, too. Better pet care will result when pet lovers and veterinarians understand that stress is the underlying cause of every form of health problem a dog or cat can have.

Stress, combined with diet and other environmental concerns, can present serious —- but unspecific —- symptoms that can worry both the pet and the pet owner.

It is important to distinguish between acute stress, immediate and intense, versus chronic stress, a real drag on wellness that results from a long-standing cause of stress. The best way to support your pet's present and future wellness is through stress prevention. Tune into the kinds of stress that

affect your pet and stress-proof the ways you look after their daily needs. For instance, boredom and loneliness are probably the most damaging stress factors in a pet's life.

Tips for pet owners who want healthier, happier pets include:

* Think Before You Adopt -– It's critical to ask yourself serious questions about your lifestyle and future before you adopt a pet. In that sense, you can better choose an animal whose needs are similar to your own. By being honest with yourself about your personal circumstance, you can ensure that your pet won't face a stressful future and inevitable health problems.

* Establish Your Role – You need to see your role and your veterinarian's role in a different way. While you are in the best position to influence your dog or cat, your veterinarian can be a good coach who provides you opinions and advice that help you make better choices regarding the care and feeding of your pet.

* Watch Their Diet – Just as processed foods are being blamed for an increase in obesity for people, causing a wide variety of health problems, processed food is a danger for pets, as well. Look into switching over to a new trend in pet food, raw foods. They can be found in pet specialty shops and grocery stores in the refrigerated section. They are also known as "fresh" foods for pets, so ask your store managers about them. They provide a balanced diet with none of the dangers associated with processed food, which makes up the majority of the pet foods available at pet stores and supermarkets today.

There is a new holistic way of caring for your pet that incorporates a combination of different approaches to health care – traditional, indigenous, energy-based, and recent developments in Western science all contribute to this new method. There is a direct relationship between the emotional health of a pet and that pet's physical health, just as there

is in humans. When we're stressed out from work or family issues, our immune systems suffer. We lose sleep, and we are far more susceptible to the bug that's always going around. We're mammals, and so are dogs and cats.

What makes us think they are any different? The truth is, when we're stressed out, so are our pets. Just as pets can sense anger, fear or illness in us – which explains why pets try to comfort us when we're sick – they can also sense our stress.

By addressing the stress in our own lives, we can help keep our pets stress-free and prevent many of the common illnesses that plague them, making them happy and healthy companions for a long time to come."

Paul McCutcheon is a veterinarian and founder of Toronto's East York Animal Clinic, serving 5,000 patients, and a former director of the American Holistic Veterinary Medical Association and the Human-Animal Bond Association of Canada.

Teens sought for outdoor adventure program

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

The American River Conservancy in Coloma is seeking teen applicants for its second summer of outdoor adventure and education programs.

The Conservancy's Epic Sierra Adventures takes teens on two-week trips rafting, kayaking, mountain biking and backpacking in some of California's most outstanding scenery – the American River, Lake Tahoe, Mono Lake and Yosemite.

However, the non-profit organization sees the program as different from others because it has lower costs than some others, and because it builds education and service projects into the trips' fun activities.

Read the whole story

Class to drive smart at the start

A free driver safety course aimed at helping newly licensed and upcoming teenager drivers is available through the California Highway Patrol.

With teenage drivers are injured and dying at an alarming rate, officers will review ways to avoid accidents.

The next Start Smart class is scheduled for April 5 at 6pm at the South High School Library, 1735 Lake Tahoe Blvd. Classes last two hours and are free. Please call CHP at (530) 577-1001 to reserve.

Iron Girl tri returning to South Shore

It's not too early to start training for the Sept. 18 Athleta Iron Girl Lake Tahoe South Shore. It is a triathlon consisting of a 400-meter swim, 24K bike and 5K run.

It is a women-only event.

Launched in 2004 with two races, the Iron Girl Series has grown to include 13 events nationwide, varying in distance from 5K to duathlon and triathlon. Iron Girl recently introduced its first half-marathon with plans to expand on the distance in 2012.

With the mission of empowering women toward a healthy lifestyle, Iron Girl has celebrated finishers ranging in age from five to 89 years old with an average age of 35. Visit the website for more information.

Green Lodging Conference brings change to hotel business

By Linda Fine Conaboy

Hilton Hotels is changing the way it does business because of a green lodging conference in South Lake Tahoe.

Will something that significant happen at this summer's conference? Only time can answer that question. But those putting the Aug. 22-25 seminar together are aiming for big things.

"It'll be a larger conference coming off the momentum of last year," Bill Cottrill, director of sales and marketing at Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe said. His property, which is part of the Hilton family, is hosting the second annual West Coast Green Lodging Conference like it did last year.



Hilton Hotels is changing how it lights its properties. Photos/Provided

The meeting is aimed at hotel general managers, chief engineers, innkeepers and owners.

“There’s a lot of enthusiasm. Last year many corporate folks learned a lot; this year they want their entire team here,” Cottrill said.

He pointed out that the cost, about $300, is not much for a conference, especially for one where attendees can learn such things as how to begin and implement a green program, why going green is valuable and even how the community benefits.

“They definitely got their money’s worth last year,” said David Hansen, engineer at the South Lake Tahoe Embassy Suites. “If they implemented just one or two things, the pay back could be in just a couple of weeks. Just simple things like changing light bulbs. If they took just that one idea back, it was more than worth the price of admission.”

Hansen says attendees will also learn about waste reduction and recycling, food waste composting and compostable products, all of which will be on the agenda in August.

Hansen said he received feedback from Embassy Suites in San Luis Obispo that has realized savings in its energy costs as

well as the Hilton Chicago where all of the food waste is now being composted. The Hilton website reveals the chain is the first in the world to earn LEED and Green Seal environmental certifications.

“My hope this year is that someone who was at the last conference can speak about how they’ve instituted sustainability at their property,” Hansen said.



David Hansen

So dedicated has Hilton become to implementing sustainability within their brand, they developed, tested and last year officially unveiled LightStay, a proprietary system developed to calculate and analyze the environmental impact of Hilton Worldwide’s 1,300 properties using the system. Results showed enough energy was saved to power 5,700 homes for a year, while enough water was conserved to fill more than 650 Olympic-size swimming pools. In addition, these properties reduced carbon output equivalent to taking close to 35,000 cars off the road, all of which resulted in an estimated savings of more than $29 million in utility costs in one year.

Embassy Suites Lake Tahoe is participating in LightStay.

“We are able to benchmark ourselves against other Hilton Properties,” Cottrill says, adding that Lake Tahoe is No. 1 within the Embassy brand and No. 5 in electrical efficiency for the entire Hilton organization.

Always conscious of additional ways to add to their property’s sustainability program, Cottrill and Hansen ticked off a

number of programs implemented there. Here are a few:

• A computer system designed for the automated control and monitoring of the heating, ventilation and lighting needs of the buildings.

• All 400 suites have programmable occupancy sensing thermostats.

• The hotel is testing “Green Switch” in a few suites to pinpoint the return on investment on this device designed to save energy consumption by turning off the power to certain outlets (like the TV) and lighting when guests leave for the day.

• Replacement of 165, 40-watt incandescent exit lights with one watt LED light.

• Replacement of 80 garage lighting fixtures with LED lighting.

• Removal of over 300 unnecessary lights.

• The use of only compostable, plant based plates, cups, spoons, etc. in food take- out facilities.

• Ozone laundry systems.

• Collecting and re-selling recyclables such as cans and bottles.

• Promoting zero waste events.

In addition, Embassy Suites has formed collaborative relationships with South Tahoe Refuse and Full Circle Compost, a company producing organic compost and soil nutrition needs in Minden.

“It probably will never end,” Cottrill says. “Our green efforts have brought us some business we wouldn’t have had. Sustainability is now at the forefront of many meeting

planner’s minds,” he says. “It’s not just money you can save from the program; it’s top line revenue (money to be made), whereas bottom line savings is the profit from changing your efficiencies—very simple things.”

“You never stop,” Hansen said in regards to being green enough.. “People ask me all the time, ‘when will you be finished going green?’ The answer is never. It’s a lifestyle change. I come up with new ideas all the time. Employees come up with new ideas—it’s endless.”

For details about this year’s green conference, go online.

Bomb squad called out to Topaz Ranch

The Tahoe Douglas Bomb Squad was called out to a Topaz Ranch Estates residence Thursday evening to handle a World War II-era hand grenade, the Douglas County Sheriff’s Department reported. The address is unknown.

Two Douglas residents found the device while going through another resident’s belongings at about 6:30pm. The residents took the device to the sheriff’s station in Minden where officers created a perimeter around the device left in the vehicle. The bomb squad moved the explosive to a bomb-proof container.

It’s unclear at this point whether the device was detonated.

Residents are advised not to handle explosives. Instead, law enforcement suggests to call 911.

Poetry slam slated

With April being National Poetry month, Lake Tahoe Community College plans to put on its first poetry slam.

The slam, to be hosted by Grand Slam champions Matt Blesse and Denise Jolly, is slated for April 26 at 7pm. in the LTCC Teaching and Learning Center.

Up to 10 competitors may participate. The entry fee is $5, but the winner will go away with a cash prize.

The event, which is free and open to the general public, is organized by the LTCC Writers’ Series.