Use of reclaimed wood growing in Tahoe-Reno

By Jason Hildago, Reno Gazette-Journal

It ain’t exactly hugging a tree. But it’s pretty darn close.

While solar, wind and hybrid technology typically get most of the attention for going green, using reclaimed lumber and construction materials is one green trend that tree huggers still will appreciate.

And apparently, it’s a trend that’s growing.

Scott Gillespie, principal designer for Tahoe City-based design firm Sandbox Studios, has seen a significant uptick in the demand for reclaimed materials like lumber among his clients.

In the past two years, the percentage of the firm’s projects that use reclaimed materials jumped from about 10 percent to 15 percent to 50 percent, Gillespie said.

“A lot of people like the aesthetics of it,” he said. “They also like the fact that there’s a story behind it – we’ve used reclaimed wood from things like railroad trestles to an old water tank. Then, there’s the socially redeeming value from preserving our natural resources.”

Read the whole story

Opinion: The human face of church's lack of respect

By Brian Cahill

I am a Catholic who voted against Proposition 8 in 2008 and contributed $1,000 to the No on 8 Campaign, a Catholic who is sustained by regular Mass, scripture and prayer. I am also the father of a gay son, from whom I was slow to learn how painful, debilitating and denigrating are the constant legal and social reminders that he and those like him are not fully accepted members of the human community.

In their statement supporting Prop. 8, the California Catholic Bishops declared that marriage is "intrinsic to stable, flourishing and hospitable societies." Ironically, this is one of the compelling reasons gay and lesbian couples wish to be joined in civil marriages. They are seeking a structure and context for their love, commitment, fidelity and mutual support.

Many believe that the ideal for children is to be raised by a mother and a father, yet we know what the divorce rate is among heterosexual couples. We know there are 75,000 children in the California foster care system, a quarter of them waiting to be adopted. We know that these children have been victimized by the inability, neglect or abuse of their heterosexual parents. These mothers and fathers are living proof that sexual orientation is not a reliable indicator of good parenting.

Our bishops are clear that gays and lesbians must be respected and not disparaged, and I know they mean it. The archbishop of San Francisco, regardless of his position on Prop. 8, means it. His first response to specific issues regarding gays and lesbians is always pastoral.

Brian Cahill is the former executive director of Catholic Charities in San Francisco.

Read the whole story

DUI enforcement in S. Tahoe on St. Paddy's Day

St. Patrick's Day is a popular night out to socialize with friends, family and coworkers. However, with so many local establishments promoting alcohol sales or special promotional events, far too many drunken drivers head out onto streets, making it dangerous for all, according to police officers.

As a counter measure to all the green beer on sale St. Patty's Day, the Avoid the 6 DUI Task Force will deploy additional DUI Roving Saturation Patrols into South Lake Tahoe and Placerville March 17 in the ongoing campaign to take careless, dangerous drunk or "buzzed" drivers off the road before they crash.

The extra Avoid DUI Saturation patrols will be supplementing regularly scheduled shift deployments planned for Thursday. The specialized DUI Officers will be focusing in areas with high incidents of DUI collisions and arrests.

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department recommends the following easy steps, for a safe St. Patrick's Day.

• Plan a safe way home before the festivities begin;

• Before drinking, designate a sober driver and leave your car keys at home;

• If you’re impaired, use a taxi, call a sober friend or family member, or use public transportation so you are sure to get home safely;

• If you happen to see a drunk driver on the road, don’t hesitate to Call 911;

• And remember, if you know someone who is about to drive or ride while impaired, take their keys and help them make other arrangements to get to where they are going safely.

The Avoid the 6 DUI Campaign is funded by a grant from the California Office of Traffic Safety, through the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration. The coalition’s next DUI Campaigns are set for Cinco de Mayo and Memorial Day Weekend.

Defendants in South Shore transit case gain ground

By Kathryn Reed

RENO – A federal judge on Monday dismissed the majority of the 16 complaints filed by MV Transportation against STATA, its board members and the organizations the individuals represent.

The Fairfield-based transit agency that once ran BlueGo, the bus system on the South Shore, sued the nonprofit South Tahoe Area Transit Authority last year on a number of issues. STATA then filed for bankruptcy and has since disbanded.



BlueGo buses keep rolling despite a federal lawsuit involving a former operator. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The proceedings March 14 were in U.S. Bankruptcy Court in Reno because STATA was a Nevada entity.

Judge Gregg Zive throughout the nearly 3½-hour proceeding told the two attorneys representing MV that they had much to still prove and that he wasn't convinced of most of their allegations.

"To me this looks like straight action with only one defendant – STATA. It's a contract action and you want to liquidate the claim," Zive said.

MV contends it is owed $2 million from STATA. There is nearly $700,000 sitting in an account being overseen by the Douglas County Sheriff's Office because MV was able to get a different judge to freeze the account. Zive ordered it put in the registry of the court so DCSO would no longer be part of the proceedings.

"The cause of action against STATA primarily remains. That was our argument all along. This is between MV and STATA," South

Lake Tahoe City Attorney Patrick Enright told *Lake Tahoe News* outside of court. “I would call it significant progress for the city. It significantly narrows the scope of the issues. I think MV will struggle to put together a complaint to meet the federal standards.”

The judge dismissed the breach of contract issue as it relates to the public entities, but is allowing MV to argue the point again in regards to the private companies.

All of the entities involved in the case were part of the hearing except for Douglas County, which was supposed to have its own court appearance in April. However, the judge decided to wrap the county into future proceedings.

Douglas County’s attorney after the session was adjourned told Jessica Woelfel and Dale Campbell, MV’s attorneys, his client never signed the operating agreement that other STATA members agreed to years ago so there would no basis to continue with their charges against Douglas County.

Several of the complaints by MV relate to the operating agreement.

Woelfel said an official quote was not possible without first speaking to her client.

About a dozen attorneys were in court representing the various defendants. Not all parties are named in each complaint. El Dorado County settled after mediation hearings in the fall.

The defendants are:

• STATA

• Tahoe Regional Planning Agency

• Douglas County

• South Lake Tahoe

- Heavenly Mountain Resort
- Tropicana Entertainment
- Harrah’s Operating Company
- Harvey’s Tahoe Management Company
- Lakeside Inn
- Michelle Bertgstrom
- Jerald Higgenson
- Nancy McDermid
- Troy McGregor
- Glenn Koehler
- Stacy Dingman
- Rick Angelocci
- Kathay Lovell
- Dan Garrison
- Casey Blann
- Andrew Strain
- Matt Krystofiak
- Norma Santiago
- Bruce Grego
- Horizon Casino
- Lake Tahoe Casino Realty
- Columbia Properties Tahoe

• Anna Hastie

• Ridge Tahoe Property Owners Association

• Tahoe Transportation District.

In the 11 motions South Lake Tahoe was named in, seven were dismissed without leave – meaning they no longer exist. The remaining issues were dismissed with leave – meaning MV can try again to convince the judge.

To whatever MV files next, Enright said the defendants will "have to file an answer to the complaint or another motion to dismiss."

Enright estimates $20,000 has been paid to Louis Bubala to have him represent South Lake Tahoe in this case.

MV attorneys have until April 22 to file their amendments. The defendants have until May 23 to respond.

Deputies recover stolen property in El Dorado County

When El Dorado County sheriff's deputies conducted a probation search of a home in the 2300 block of Apache Pass Road in Somerset on Saturday morning it resulted in two people being arrested and the recovery of stolen property.

"A search of the residence and outbuildings revealed an overwhelming amount of suspected stolen property," deputies said in a press release. "It is believed the stolen items were taken during multiple residential burglaries and thefts which occurred in both El Dorado and Amador counties.

The primary suspect in the case, Alyssa Carole Rossetta, 40, resident of Somerset is still on the run. Officers did not immediately release the names of the two who were detained.

Anyone with information regarding her whereabouts should call (530) 621.6600.

All of the seized property, which is suspected of being stolen, is in the care of sheriff's office for identification and further follow-up. Victims of thefts and burglaries wishing to see property for identification may call (530) 642.4729.

MontBleu's parent company writes down quarterly asset values

By Steve Green, Las Vegas Sun

Tropicana Entertainment Inc., investor Carl Icahn's gaming company, on Monday said it took $20.7 million in noncash accounting charges to write down the value of certain intangible assets in the fourth quarter.



The company, for the period March 8, 2010-Dec. 31, 2010, reported breakeven results when factoring out those expenses.

Tropicana said in its annual report that including the asset-

writedown expenses, it lost $20.9 million on net revenue of $539 million for the March-December period.

Comparable results for the same period in 2009 aren't available since the company reported results beginning on March 8, 2010, when it acquired the Tropicana in Atlantic City.

Tropicana Entertainment acquired several casinos out of the Tropicana Entertainment Holdings LLC bankruptcy.

The Tropicana Las Vegas hotel-casino was acquired out of the bankruptcy by a different group of investors.

Besides the 2,129-room Tropicana Atlantic City, Icahn's Las Vegas-based Tropicana Entertainment Inc. has smaller properties in Evansville, Ind.; Laughlin and Stateline; Greenville and Vicksburg, Miss.; Baton Rouge, La.; and in Aruba.

The fourth quarter charges included $3.7 million to write down the value of the Tropicana trade name, $10.5 million related to the gaming license at Casino Aztar in Indiana, $4.8 million related to the gaming license at Belle of Baton Rouge, La., and $1.7 million related to the impairment of goodwill at Belle of Baton Rouge.

"The trade name and Baton Rouge impairments were primarily due to reduced revenue and cash flow projections while the impairment at Casino Aztar was primarily due to higher capital expenditure assumptions, lower free cash flow amounts and changes in the weighted average cost of capital, which reduced the fair value of the gaming license," the company said.

Read the whole story

Peace Vigil in South Lake Tahoe

Unity at the Lake is hosting a Peace Vigil on March 21 at 6pm in front of the Senior Center, 3050 Lake Tahoe Blvd. in South Lake Tahoe.

The public is invited and encouraged to attend.

The Tahoe Peace Vigil is being held in support of a candlelight vigil on the same day in Afghanistan (Afghan New Year's Day), organized by the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers who wish to "live without wars." The Afghan youth will "light fiery candles of grief for all the youth and children of Afghanistan and the world who have been killed in conflict and in wars."

This meaningful event is an opportunity for people to make a difference in the world and to foster healing and wholeness.

For more information about the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers and their "Live Without Wars" project, go online.

Sugar Pine Foundation lecture

The Sugar Pine Foundation will share the agency's collaborative strategy to preserve the White Pines currently plagued by a nonnative fungus as part of the Explore Tahoe Winter Speaker Series on March 24 at 6pm. Learn how you can help restore the Sugar Pines. Explore Tahoe: An Urban Trailhead is located in the Heavenly Village next to North Face at 4114 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

Parking garage special rate of $5 flat fee after 4pm.

For more information, contact (530) 542.4637.

Investigation: CalPERS bribery case involving Tahoe man cost fund millions

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

The bribery scandal at CalPERS likely cost the pension fund tens of millions of dollars, a lawyer hired by CalPERS to investigate the matter concluded today.

Washington securities lawyer Philip Khinda, in a 56-page report to the CalPERS board, said former board member Alfred Villalobos effectively corrupted top officials at the fund, notably former Chief Executive Fred Buenrostro, to steer investments to his clients. Khinda named four other CalPERS officials close to Villalobos: former board members Charles Valdes, Kurato Shimada and the late Robert Carlson, and former investment officer Leon Shahinian.

Villalobos and Buenrostro have been sued by the California attorney general on corruption charges. Federal prosecutors are investigating the matter, according to CalPERS documents.

Khinda said the affair created a perception in the investment industry that one needed close ties to CalPERS, as Villalobos had, to get the pension fund's attention.

"Maybe I should change my last name to Villalobos to insure that I get a call back," a financier named Dan Weinstein once

told Shahinian, according to Khinda's report.

Reacting to the report, CalPERS pledged to continue its reform efforts. "Let this episode in our history never be forgotten," President Rob Feckner said.

Khinda said Buenrostro was "unfit to serve" as CEO and was ousted in 2008. At the time, CalPERS said he had retired. Buenrostro went to work for Villalobos right after.

As he was leaving, he signed dubious statements claiming CalPERS knew of Villalobos' fees. Otherwise, Villalobos would have been denied $20 million in fees by his top client, Apollo Global Management.

Khinda said Buenrostro tried to pressure the staff to direct investments to Villalobos' clients, who became known around CalPERS as "friends of Fred."

The staff didn't bend, and made investments on their merits, Khinda wrote. But when it came to negotiating terms of the deals, CalPERS was "made to overpay" the fees it gave its investment partners, probably by tens of millions of dollars.

Villalobos' clients paid him commissions totalling $50 million for securing CalPERS investments. Khinda said some firms likely inflated the fees they charged CalPERS to make up for the money they secretly paid Villalobos. In effect, if CalPERS knew of the money Villalobos was making, it could have struck a harder bargain with its investment partners.

Khinda has subsequently obtained $300 million in discounts for CalPERS, mostly from Villalobos clients.

Much of the Khinda report, which will be presented to the CalPERS board Tuesday, contains information that's already been made public, including Villalobos' alleged bribery of Buenrostro, Valdes and Shahinian. All have denied any wrongdoing.

But the Khinda report does contain striking details.

David Snow, CEO of Medco Health Solutions, a New Jersey drug benefits firm seeking a CalPERS contract, met Villalobos and Buenrostro at Villalobos' Lake Tahoe home in 2004. Later Medco paid Villalobos $4 million to help win the contract, Khinda said.

Read the whole story

Heavenly Ski Foundation gala this week

The Heavenly Ski and Snowboard Foundation's 25th Anniversary Gala is March 18 from 6:30-9:30pm at Heavenly's California Lodge on Saddle Road in South Lake Tahoe.

The event will feature a Champagne toast, heavy gourmet hors d'oeuvres, a silent auction and a cash beer and wine bar. Advance tickets are $40. They may be purchased by calling Foundation Director Aimi Xistra-Rich at 530.314.9285 or by e-mail at aimix@heavenlyfoundationteam.org.

Tickets will also be available at the door of the event for $45; however, advance purchase is recommended, as quantities are limited.