Ski report: Powder, powder, powder



Snow – it’s the word for the day.

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

The groundhog was wrong – winter hasn’t gone away

By Kathryn Reed

That all too familiar hum of winter was echoing through the Lake Tahoe Basin this morning long before the break of day. That would be the snowblower.

More than 6 inches of white stuff had fallen at lake level on the South Shore by 7am, with no sign of it stopping. Expect more with the winter storm warning in effect until 10 tonight.

Schools at the lake in Douglas County have been canceled. Classes are also canceled at Tahoe-Truckee Unified.

The National Weather Service in Reno is calling for periods of heavy snowfall today – meaning 3 inches an hour in some areas of the Sierra. Western Nevada can expect 1 to 2 inches an hour.



Sue Wood starts Feb. 16 by clearing her South Lake Tahoe driveway. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The brunt of this storm is expected to be here until 10am.

By the time it blows east, 1 to 2 feet could have fallen at the lake, with 3 to 5 feet above 7,000 feet.

Another storm is expected in the area Thursday afternoon and lingering until Friday evening.

Roads are slick and restrictions are in place. Check the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News* to find up-to-date road conditions. Visibility is so bad over Spooner Summit that some commuters turned around and took a vacation day.

These storms slated for the rest of the week are cold ones. The mercury isn't expected to hit 30 all week in Tahoe. The low tonight is forecast to be 9 degrees in South Lake Tahoe, rising to 14 as a low Friday night.

Fallen Leaf Lake contends with liquor, voter fraud issues

By Kathryn Reed

It may not be known for a while who will be operating the store at Fallen Leaf Lake, but it could be decided at the next board meeting if alcohol will be allowed to be consumed this summer.

Controversy swirled last summer that resulted in no alcohol being sold out of the store at the end of the South Shore lake. This is because some of the residents of the enclave believed sales of alcohol would create a dangerous scenario with potentially impaired people driving on the narrow, curvy road.



The politics of Fallen Leaf Lake are nowhere near as tranquil as the water. Photo/Kathryn Reed

In the past, the store operated with a liquor license much like a grocery store – no consumption on the premise. Rob and

Sandy Wirth, who had the concessionaire contract last season, wanted to get a license allowing people to drink beer or wine on site. Then the uproar started. Then they decided not to sell alcohol in any form.

There are those who contend the lack of liquor sales prevented the Wirths from making money. The Wirths have exercised their right to back out of the contract after one year. A settlement agreement has been tentatively reached, with the final details being worked out. Until it's completed, the document is not for public review.

The Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District is accepting applications until Feb. 28 from perspective concessionaires for the upcoming season.

At the March meeting it's likely an item for discussion and possible action regarding liquor licenses will be on the agenda.

At the board's Feb. 12 meeting, President Tom Bacchetti told those in attendance he has been told a handful of residents have hired an attorney to investigate voter fraud. This would affect most of the board members. Bacchetti said it was referred to the El Dorado County District Attorney's Office, which in turn referred it to the Secretary of State's Office.

Shannan Velayas with the fraud division of the Secretary of State's Office told *Lake Tahoe News* her department cannot reveal if an investigation is going on, much like police don't disclose when an entity is being investigated.

Velayas said anytime sufficient evidence of wrongdoing is found, that material is handed over to law enforcement, such as a district attorney. The DA has the ability to prosecute people, not the Secretary of State's office.

At issue at Fallen Leaf Lake is who is allowed to vote in elections and who can be elected.

Rafting fees going up on American River

By Gus Thomson, Auburn Journal

State Parks will be asking river-rafting businesses to dig deeper into their pockets as it works to make up for Bureau of Reclamation funding cutbacks in the Auburn State Recreation Area.

Recreation Area Superintendent Mike Lynch said rafting fees on both the north and middle forks of the American River are being raised this season.

The charge to whitewater-rafting contractors on the two rivers will increase 40 percent from $5 to $7 for each raft customer that takes part in a trip.

The Auburn State Recreation Area also has jurisdiction over South Fork whitewater licensing at Coloma. Fees there will rise 50 percent to $3 from $2, Lynch said.

With bureau cutbacks and State Parks needs to make up $300,000 due to federal funding cutbacks, Lynch said the recreation area's user fee for parking will also be expanding into a new area. Plans are for parkers along the Weimar area's Ponderosa Way to start paying a $10 fee. The area covers parkland near the Ponderosa Bridge over the North Fork of the American River.

Read the whole story

Snowboarder magazine shooting at Sierra

Snowboarder magazine's THE HIT comes to Sierra Resort on March 12.

New this season, THE HIT lets locals experience the excitement of a large-scale photo shoot with an oversized custom build and the industry's top photographers clicking shutter buttons from every angle. Get that perfect shot and it could end up in *Snowboarder* magazine. Sierra-at-Tahoe is the only Tahoe stop for this rider-judged contest, and will draw Northern California's top regional athletes for a chance to get noticed by one of snowboarding's most respected publications.

For more information, go online or call (530) 659.7453.

Hagar burns bridges in uncensored memoir

By Paul Liberatore, Marin Independent Journal

Sammy Hagar's memoir, "Red: My Uncensored Life in Rock," doesn't comes out until March, but I've just finished reading an advance copy and I can tell you that there's one poor guy who's going to wish it had never seen the light of day: Eddie Van Halen.

Sammy's one of the nicest guys I've met in rock 'n' roll, but

Marin’s Red Rocker shows his former Van Halen bandmate no mercy, portraying Eddie as more street person than guitar god.

This is Sammy describing him just before their Van Halen reunion tour in 2003: “I hadn’t seen him in 10 years. He looked like he hadn’t bathed in a week. He certainly hadn’t changed his clothes in at least that long. He wasn’t wearing a shirt. He had on a giant overcoat and army pants, tattered and ripped at the cuffs, held up with a piece of rope. I’d never seen him so skinny in my life. He was missing a number of teeth and the ones he had left were black. His boots were so worn out he had gaffer’s tape wrapped around them and his big toe still stuck out.”

In passages like that, “Red” reads like one of those angry e-mails we write when we’re really ticked off at someone and need to vent by trashing him or her. But once we chill out, most of us don’t hit the send button. With this book, Sammy hits the send button.

And he hits it over and over. After describing the squalor that he claims Eddie lived in, Sammy lays into him again, writing: “This was Eddie Van Halen, one of the sweetest guys I’d ever met. He had turned into the weirdest (expletive) I’d ever seen, crude, rude and unkempt.”

Read the whole story

Opinion: Rethink role of Reno-Sparks Convention &

Visitors Bureau

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Feb. 9, 2011, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

The "Great Recession" has forced governments throughout the country, from the federal government to counties, cities and towns, to seriously rethink the way they do things.

Because of declining revenues, they're asking important questions: Is this something we should be doing? Are we doing it in the most cost-effective and efficient manner? Can we restructure our operations to streamline them and make them more flexible?

The Reno-Sparks Convention & Visitors Authority is among the agencies that has been going through that process. With the industries that it was established to serve, gaming and tourism, in the doldrums and another search about to begin for a new CEO, however, the time is right for a broader look at the authority's structure.

It's time to ask whether the hybrid public-private governance model of the RSCVA is still the best way to boost the numbers of business and leisure visitors to the Reno-Sparks area and North Lake Tahoe.

Read the whole story

Legislative analyst's

proposed cuts if June ballot fails

By Kevin Yamamura, Sacramento Bee

The Legislative Analyst's Office provides a sobering take on how to solve the state's $26.6 billion deficit without new tax dollars in a memo released Monday.

School districts would shorten the school year by a few more days, districts would increase K-3 class sizes and college tuition would soar. The state would soften its "three strikes" sentencing policy. And state workers would pay more in health care costs and face another round of two furloughs a month.

The 11-page letter comes in response to a request by Sen. Mark Leno, D-San Francisco, who asked the analyst's office to suggest how the Legislature might solve the deficit without $13.5 billion in additional taxes.

"The LAO report is important information for people to consider, and the Legislature to consider, about what our choices are over the next (few) weeks," Senate President Pro Tem Darrell Steinberg said. "And then, ultimately, what the people's choices will be come June."

Few legislators in either party could stomach such deep cuts; Democrats are having a hard enough time accepting the sweeping social service and health reductions that Gov. Jerry Brown proposed in his January budget. They already plan to reject some of Brown's ideas, such as cutting off aid for children in the state's welfare-to-work program after 48 months, and replace the proposals with alternative savings.

Steinberg said he doesn't think the analyst's cuts will reach the floor for a vote.

Read the whole story

Heavenly Village entities look at new era of cooperation

By Kathryn Reed

Movement is afoot to alter language in the multi-year agreement regulating who pays what and does what at Heavenly Village. South Lake Tahoe officials brought the idea to the board Tuesday with the hopes of possibly being able to offer in-kind services, help with special events and restructuring parking fees as incentives to pay less each month.

“I think everyone at this table wants it to be successful. We’ll put together a group to talk about parking and the existing agreement,” PADMA board Chairman Greg Campbell told City Manager Tony O’Rourke at the Feb. 15 meeting. He said the board would have something to bring to the table at or before the April meeting.

Park Avenue Development Maintenance Association is the organization formulated in 2002 to maintain the Heavenly Village. The two Marriott properties pay 55 percent collectively, Heavenly Mountain Resort 20 percent, South Lake Tahoe 20 percent, Trans Sierra Investments 2.5 percent, and Cecil’s 2.5 percent for the upkeep.



The fee structure at Heavenly Village garage is likely to be altered. Photo/LTN file

Attorney Lew Feldman, who represents PADMA, pointed out there is a separate parking agreement between the city and PADMA that calls for the board to be consulted regarding parking fee changes at the village garage even though it is owned by the city. That hasn't been happening.

"The parking structure should be an enhancement for the village and it's not," O'Rourke told fellow PADMA board members.

He broached the idea of instituting the "Free after 3" program like Vail has, but added, "To do so we need to off-set the costs."

If the Free after 3 idea were implemented, the city would take an additional $100,000 a year loss on the parking garage that already loses $100,000 and has a debt of $7.2 million that is gradually being paid off. That is why the city, as O'Rourke told the board, "wants relief with our agreement."

Officials from Vail will be in Tahoe in the next couple weeks to offer advice about what the city can do with its financially failing concrete structure.

The idea is to get more locals to use the garage and therefore

frequent the businesses in the village.

But Feldman also pointed out the trend is more people are staying in vacation rentals, so a reasonable parking rate – or free at times – would be incentive for those tourists to venture to the Stateline area village.

He also noted with the garage being the most underutilized during the midweek that in the past the idea of having a parking pass for Heavenly season passholders was brought up but went nowhere.

Pete Sonntag, general manager of the ski resort, is a PADMA board member. He didn't comment on Feldman's midweek parking incentive idea.

To offer different types of parking options for people, O'Rourke told the PADMA board it's possible about 30 spaces could be created at the transit center, with the first two or three hours free.

When it came time to discuss how much retailers pay the city per validation coupon, Feldman said the idea for the movie theater to pay so little compared to others was to get locals to the village.

O'Rourke contends with the length of time movies are in the theater – months not weeks – that would point toward the theater having an eye toward tourists, not locals and therefore wants the board's help with making the validations equitable. The city manager also asked for assistance with getting all retailers to offer validation that will provide consistency for retailers.

Gary Casteel from Trans Sierra Investments, the group that owns the bulk of the retail buildings, said it's easier for someone selling high-end art to offer validation than someone selling an ice cream cone.

In the era of trying to all play nicer together, Feldman pointed out there was resistance from officials with the city who are no longer on the payroll for things like banners and other visual displays to spruce up the area.

“Let’s look at this relationship from a different perspective and bury the adversarial tones,” O’Rourke said.

O’Rourke told the PADMA board how the current council wants to build partnerships – which includes with the folks at Heavenly Village. It’s part of the council’s economic development plan.

The more Heavenly Village is successful, the more sales and hotel taxes the city collects – not to mention parking fees.

Feldman said most of the businesses are seeing double-digit gains over the prior year. Campbell noted the Marriott properties are doing well this season, too.

“Luxury items are off a little bit like the rest of the country,” Casteel said.

Kerry David with David & Johnson certified public accountants went over the November and December financials. The numbers prove early snow isn’t always a good thing.

Snowmelt was budgeted to cost $1,746 in November, when in fact the bill came to $16,975. For December, the deficit was $4,584. The good news is a dry January made up $19,000 in savings with no snow on the ground to melt.

Youth softball signups begin

in March

High Sierra A.S.A softball sign ups for girls and boys ages 5-16 are March 2 from 5:30-7pm at the South Lake Tahoe Recreation Center, March 8 from 5:30-7pm at Kahle Community Park in Stateline, and March 24 from 5:30-7pm at the South Lake Tahoe Rec Center.

The cost is $100 for the first child, $175 for two children and $225 for three children.