Dogs and Valentine's chocolate don't mix

By Jack Sommars, AAHA

The folks at the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals' (ASPCA) Poison Control Center don't need a calendar to know when it's Christmas or Valentine's Day. Their phones ring off the hook. Yet another pet – most likely a dog – has gotten into some chocolate.

"We actually have what we call a chocolate season," explains Dr. Tina Wismer, a veterinary toxicologist for the ASPCA. "It runs from Halloween until Valentine's Day. That's when we get most of our chocolate-related calls."

Last year, their center received 6,900 of these calls – 98 percent of them involving dogs.

"Dogs don't have an off-switch," she explains. "Most have a sweet tooth and will eat as much as they can. Cats, on the other hand, may nibble a bit but don't gorge themselves like dogs will."

Why is chocolate so dangerous?

Read the whole story

South Tahoe on path to change

how it does business

By Kathryn Reed

A blueprint for how South Lake Tahoe will conduct business is taking shape, with adoption of the formal strategic plan expected at the March 1 council meeting.

The City Council spent about 90 minutes last week creating substance for the five priorities the group agreed to at the prior meeting.

Besides what the council envisions for the area, City Manager Tony O'Rourke is doing is own assessments that are designed to complement the policy the City Council is formulating.

Also at the March 1 meeting will be O'Rourke's reorganization plan for the city.

"We need to right size the government to match resources," O'Rourke said.

What positions will be eliminated and the cost savings are not being made public. Part of the secrecy is the need to discuss matters with unions. *Lake Tahoe News* has been told the cuts will be at various levels, not just rank and file employees.

O'Rourke told the council during the workshop portion of the Feb. 8 meeting under the Fiscal Sustainability section that change is coming. The plan calls for looking at "shifting city's employee compensation system from a longevity-based step plan to a pay-for-performance system that rewards results."

He said, "We are just paying people to show up and I don't think that's our goal. We have good employees. We need to

recognize them.”

Nancy Kerry, who works in the Housing and Redevelopment Department, has been assisting O’Rourke with the intricacies of the strategic plan.

Another thing O’Rourke is looking at is how the city delivers services. He is considering privatizing some of the city’s resources such as the ice arena.

“We don’t have to be the direct provider of services,” O’Rourke told the council.

The council agreed the goal should be for the Parks and Recreation Department to cover 75 percent of it costs instead of the current 50 percent. Stan Sherer, who has been at the helm of the department for six weeks, is assessing how best and who best to operate entities under his authority.

“We need to be more entrepreneurial in how we invest in Bijou (Golf Course). Maybe we need more special events,” Councilwoman Angela Swanson said.

At the start of the meeting the council agreed to the city’s mission statement being, “We are dedicated to providing essential, outstanding and cost-effective services that enhance the vitality and quality of life our residents, businesses and guests.”

Within the five categories of the plan are strategies to achieve the goal and performance measures.

Under Economic Development, the goal is to adopt the Tahoe Valley Community Plan by the end of the year, increase hotel tax collections by two percentage points next fiscal year, increase business licenses from 3,000 to 3,150, and increase hotel occupancy rate from 23 percent to 32 percent.

O’Rourke said he had been meeting with stakeholders “to discuss what is the community brand.”

He added, “There are not enough events celebrating the natural environment.”

Councilwoman Claire Fortier said it’s important for the city to support events even if they are not city-initiated events.

Under fiscal matters, Councilman Bruce Grego believes the city needs look at going back to voters to increase the business license fee even though it failed at the ballot in November.

Councilman Tom Davis strongly disagreed. He said there is no appetite for such a fee no matter how much the public is educated. He said his Tahoe Keys vacation rental business would have gone from paying $3,800 a year to $10,000 had the measure passed.

“If we are going to go to the public, it should be for more than $150,000,” O’Rourke said. That’s all the fee change would have generated.

When it came to the Built Environment, O’Rourke praised Mayor Hal Cole’s sign near the airport welcoming people, saying more things like that are needed in town.

The idea it to improve things like landscaping, plant flowers, and make Linear Park near Tahoe Meadows be visually appealing.

One of the strategies is to create a rating system in conjunction with the lodging and visitors bureaus for hotel properties that would encourage owners to enhance their establishments so they are at the top of the list.

A performance measure for this category is to add two business improvement districts in 2011-12 to what Ski Run Boulevard has established.

Providing a 24-hour online and voicemail service was proposed as a way to better get input from the pubic, with the idea people will get a response within 24 hours.

Playing nicer with everyone keeps being reiterated. The idea of the council having annual meetings with various boards was broached. Ironically, Douglas County Commissioner Lee Bonner spoke at the start of the regular council meeting saying his board wants to set up a meeting soon with the council to discuss matters of importance regarding the South Shore that cross the state line.

Next up is for the council is to adopt the plan. Then staff will start implementing it. The council will be provided quarterly reports, with an annual progress report created for the public, although the quarterly documents would be public documents.

Although the strategic plan is a bit of a living document, it is designed to be a vision for the next four years.

From the strategic plan, the business plan will be developed. That should be before the council in April. That in turn will drive what the budget looks like. For the first time in at least a decade, if ever, the city plans to create a five-year budget.

Environmentalists sue USFS to not log Angora burn area

Reno Gazette Journal

Environmentalists are suing the U.S. Forest Service to try to block logging at Lake Tahoe that the agency says is needed to help guard against another wildfire like the one that destroyed 254 homes three years ago.

In addition to removing downed logs that hamper firefighting efforts, the Forest Service says the Angora project will help speed regeneration of the forest and restore wildlife habitat across about half of the 3,000 acres that burned on the southwest edge of South Lake Tahoe in June 2007.

But the Earth Island Institute and Center for Biological Diversity say the logging would do more harm than good.

They say the project would do little to reduce fire threats but would disrupt the natural regeneration of the forest and eliminate about 70 percent of the last suitable habitat for the rare black-backed woodpecker across the entire 230 square miles of the national forest surrounding Lake Tahoe.



The burn area from Angora Ridge on Feb. 13. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The Forest Service's own research shows the woodpecker is highly dependent on burned forest where beetles and other insects are plentiful, especially where the fire burned intensely, as was the case across about a third of the Angora site, the lawsuit said.

The agency designated the bird the "management indicator species" for post-fire habitat throughout the Sierra Nevada in 2007. Last September, the Center for Biological Diversity and the institute's John Muir Project petitioned the California

Fish and Game Commission to declare it threatened or endangered under the state's Endangered Species Act.

"If the black-backed woodpecker is going to survive here in California, we can't keep logging its habitat. And this is exactly the kind of habitat it needs," said Justin Augustine, a staff attorney for the Center for Biological Diversity who helped prepare the lawsuit filed on Friday in U.S. District Court in Sacramento.

Read the whole story

Anderson wins second Dew Cup trophy in slopestyle

By Colin Bane, ESPN Action Sports

Nobody was more surprised than 34-year-old Janna Meyen-Weatherby when she won the Women's Slopestyle contest at Snowbasin Sunday, beating out South Lake Tahoe's Jamie Anderson and Spencer O'Brien for the win at the last stop of the Winter Dew Tour.

Weatherby blazed through the top section of the course with 50-50s and boardslides, then floated a Cab 540 mute and a backside 360 stalefish on the jumps. "I've been competing for more than two decades," she said. "When I started riding, snowboarding wasn't even allowed at most mountains, so I'm honored to still be able to hang out on a podium with people like Jamie and Spencer."

After wins at the first two stops of the tour, Jamie Anderson's second place finish Sunday was enough to secure her

second Dew Cup trophy in a row, ahead of Rebecca Torr and Jordie Karlinski.

“I’ve been having a great year and I’m so stoked to take the Dew Cup,” Anderson says. “I’m so inspired to see Janna out here laying it down and I hope I can keep progressing and stay in this for a long time.”

Meeting set to explain Lake Christopher thinning project

To combat potential public outcry when the 50-acre Lake Christopher fuels reduction project starts this summer, officials have scheduled an outreach meeting for Feb. 16 at 6pm at Lake Tahoe Airport in council chambers.

South Lake Tahoe firefighters plans to use hand crews and low-impact equipment, including a helicopter, around the Trout and Cold creek meadows. The project is slated for the first three weeks of June from 7am-6pm.

One foot path between Martin Avenue and Golden Bear Trail may be temporarily closed.

The goal of the Lake Christopher project is to reduce the risk of catastrophic wildfire by thinning overcrowded forest stands within South Lake Tahoe.

The helicopter will be used to assist in transporting cut material from the treatment area to the processing area. Small trees and slash will be chipped and transported to the landing for removal for use in biomass energy generation facilities, while sawlogs will be removed and delivered to log processing

facilities.

The project is a collaborative partnership between South Lake Tahoe, Lake Tahoe Community College, California Tahoe Conservancy and the South Tahoe Public Utility District.

The cost of the project is approximately $174,000 and is being paid for by a grant from the U.S. Forest Service.

For more information, contact Ray Zachau at (530) 542.6166.

Storing customer ZIP codes violates California law

By Denny Walsh and Rick Daysog, Sacramento Bee

Consumer advocates were celebrating, and retailers were shocked Thursday, when the California Supreme Court declared that state law bars a merchant from asking for a customer's ZIP code and recording it as part of a credit card purchase.

As part of an address, a ZIP code qualifies as personal identification information, so when a merchant asks a customer for it and records it as part of a transaction, that violates California's Credit Card Act, the high court ruled.

The unanimous 17-page opinion outlaws the widespread practice and strikes down an appellate court's 2009 decision.

The defendant, high-end household goods giant Williams-Sonoma Stores Inc., offers no reason that would justify departing from the "statute's plain language, protective purpose and legislative history," the court concluded.

Through both its attorney and its marketing vice president, San Francisco-based Williams-Sonoma declined to comment.

Read the whole story

Mammoth riders shine at Winer Dew halfpipe

By Lindsey Sine, U.S. Snowboarding

OGDEN, Utah – It was Kelly Clark's world, and we were all just observers Saturday night as the two-time Olympic medalist from Vermont threw down her newly patented 1080 to take the win and overall title in halfpipe at the Winter Dew Tour at Snowbasin in Utah. Luke Mitrani of Mammoth Mountain won the men's competition, but Louie Vito of Sandy, Utah, who won the tour's previous two stops, took the overall title.

Clark put down a front 7, cab 7, a huge frontside 1080, cab 3, front 5 and a back 5 for the win. She was followed in second place by Kaitlyn Farrington (Sun Valley, Idaho) and Japan's Soko Yamaoka was third.

In the men's competition Mitrani put down an incredible run with a double Michael chuck, frontside 9, backside 5, front 10 and a cab double 10 to earn a staggeringly high score of 97.00.

Greg Bretz of Mammoth Mountain finished second while Steve Fisher of Breckenridge, Colo., threw down with the first double cork of his career for third.

"It was a great contest, the last stop of the Dew Tour, and the crowd was amazing. A really good energy," said Mitrani. "I

can’t believe I won. I’ve never won a contest this big so I’m really tripping.”

Official results, 2011 Winter Dew Tour, Ogden, Halfpipe

Men

1. Luke Mitrani, Mammoth Lakes, CA, 97.00.

2. Greg Bretz, Mammoth Lakes, CA, 95.00

3. Steve Fisher, Breckenridge, CO, 92.00

4. Jack Mitrani, Mammoth Lakes, CA, 89.00

5. Spencer Shaw, Stratton, VT, 84.50

6. JJ Thomas, Breckenridge, CO, 80.75

7. Louie Vito, Sandy, UT, 73.50

8. Ben Watts, Bend, OR, 60.25

9. Matt Ladley, Steamboat Springs, CO, 48.75

10. Brett Esser, Breckenridge, CO, 30.00

11. Zach Black, Breckenridge, CO, 24.50

Women

1. Kelly Clark, West Dover, VT, 95.75

2. Kaitlyn Farrington, Sun Valley, ID, 91.00

3. Soko Yamaoka, Japan, 86.25

4. Hannah Teter, Belmont, VT, 74.75

5. Queralt Castellet, Spain, 70.00

6. Ellery Hollingsworth, Darien, CT, 65.00

Mancuso 6th in downhill, Vonn takes silver

By U.S. Ski Racing

GARMISCH-PARTENKIRCHEN, Germany – There is great joy in Austria today. Elisabeth Goergl picked up her second World Championship of the week, bringing Austria her 22nd global downhill title (men and women) and first since 2003 with a beautifully executed run that set the tone for a Murder's Row of top competitors who would ski just after her. Though they would challenge, none could out race her on this day as she won her first elite downhill and brought the Austrian women's team its third consecutive win at these championships.

"It's the downhill," Goergl simply said when question why this medal as a little more special to her than the super G title she won on Tuesday. She collected four World Cup downhill podiums since 2006, but never a win.

With a courageous effort that fell 0.44 seconds short, American Lindsey Vonn added a silver medal to the gold she had won in the event at Val d'Isere in 2009 and local favorite Maria Riesch (0.60 back) contributed the bronze medal to the roaring approval of her hometown fans.

"Today feels like a gold medal," said a very pleased Vonn. "It's a really great feeling and I couldn't be happier. I could feel the speed today. It was a fun downhill and I enjoyed racing it today."

The U.S. ended up with three skiers in the top 10, a feat not accomplished in a downhill in 15 years, with Squaw Valley's Julia Mancuso finishing sixth and Laurenne Ross, the first

skier on the hill today, finishing 10th for her best top-level result ever.

Mancuso challenged but never came close enough to match either Goergl or Riesch and Anja Paerson never seemed to find the flow of the course at all, finishing well off the pace 1.78 back.

“It’s amazing how different your strategy has to be if the snow changes and it’s amazing how different the course can change. Today it was like frozen spring skiing as opposed to the ice we had in the first training run,” said Mancuso. “The surface is actually really good. My game plan was just to take risks and make sure to not give myself any room for mistakes. I executed the second half of the course, but unfortunately I’m not sure where the time went on the top part.”

Vonn picked up momentum as her run progressed and she made up the bulk of her time on the last chunk of hill, coming in 0.44 econds off the pace of the Austrian. It was her first full-on speed run since sustaining a head injury Feb. 2 that has caused her difficulty gauging speed and the first real sign her recovery has approached a successful conclusion. The 2009 Worlds downhill and super G champion pulled out of the the week’s first downhill training and opted to run the final “dress rehearsal” in an unusual costume as she tested the “cloudy head,” which slowed her to a seventh-place finish in he super G, wearing loose fitting free skiing clothes to slow her down.

Tina Maze, the combined silver medalist, charged hard enough to push Mancuso down one more notch and Daniela Merighetti was solid in finishing seventh, but the race was essentially over with Vonn’s run.

Ski report: Could be windy later today



Time to do a snow dance to make sure the storm headed this way arrives mid-week as scheduled.

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

Lecture to reveal what lives deep in Lake Tahoe

Join Annie Caires in an exploration of the deepest areas of Lake Tahoe and learn about the biological community that lives within its abyss.

Caires will present a public lecture from 6-7pm March 1 at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences. The event will be held in the assembly room 139-141, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village, .

Tickets cost $5 for the general public and no charge for students with valid student identification. Prior to the presentation UC Davis offers a no-host happy hour with wine, beer and food for attendees.

Researchers from UNR and UC Davis have recently found substantial change has occurred at the bottom of Lake Tahoe over the past four decades. What is happening on the lake

bottom and what changes are being found in the plant and animal communities that inhabit deep areas of the lake? What is causing this change and how will it impact the overall health of the lake?

The team of scientists and volunteers initiated a comprehensive investigation of the lake bottom, the first since the 1960s. They used dredges to collect 400 samples from deep areas of the lake to detect changes since the 1960s survey. Looking for elusive native species, they found critters that live only in Lake Tahoe. These species include a blind shrimp that normally lives in dark caves and a stonefly that, unlike other stoneflies, lives its entire life in the lake. Meet these interesting species and learn why they might be the “canaries in the coal mine” for the health of Lake Tahoe.