Cereal makers lowering the sugar content

By Elena Conis, Los Angeles Times

Want to feed your kids a healthy breakfast without drowning them in sugar? It's a challenge – but it's getting a little easier.

Major cereal makers are rolling out less-sugary versions of some of their sweetest brands. In December, General Mills – maker of Lucky Charms, Trix and many other breakfast staples – announced that it would cut the sugar levels in all of its children's cereals to 9 grams or less per 3/4 cup serving. Last month, Post Foods announced that it had already lowered the sugar in its Fruity Pebbles and Cocoa Pebbles cereals to 9 grams per serving.

Those are big changes: Lucky Charms and Trix used to pack 14 grams of sugar per serving, and Fruity and Cocoa Pebbles used to weigh in at 12 grams of sugar per serving.

Children can still load up on sugar at breakfast time, warns Dr. Wendy Slusser, medical director of the Fit for Healthy Weight Program at UCLA's Mattel Children's Hospital. Just check out the nutrition labels on other popular brands such as Quaker Oats' Cap'n Crunch (12 grams of sugar per serving) or Kellogg's Honey Smacks (15 grams of sugar per serving).

At those levels, a bowl of breakfast cereal could go a long way toward the U.S. Department of Agriculture's recommended limit of 48 grams of added sugar for children consuming 2,200 calories a day. In fact, children with big morning appetites could easily get half their quota before their day really starts.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Time to do something about public transit

Publisher's note: ***Gloria Hartoonian read this letter to the South Lake Tahoe City Council on Feb. 8, 2011. It is being reprinted with her permission.***

Good morning Mr. Mayor and City Council Members,

Developing an attractive and efficient public transportation plan is essential to the future of South Lake Tahoe. If we do not, 20 years for now it will be clear to all that we are still a 1950s kind of a place. The center of town will still be a four-lane interstate crowded with cars; and just as we do not have enough parking now, so then, we will not have enough parking either.

Mayor [Hal] Cole is right: you never can have enough parking.

Visitors and locals should always be able to drive their own cars. For one thing, in case of fire, people need to get out of harms way and the city does not have the resources to do this. But affordable, reliable and attractive public transportation as an option has got to be developed and sold to the public. Other tourist destinations have accomplished this – including delivering families with kids and all their stuff to where they want to be.

Where the center of town is located should be our choice – a place, for example like Ski Run Boulevard – with all the potential that's there. The center of town, as it is now, has been imposed upon us: it is Highway 50 with its millions of cars. Twenty years from now will it still be so?

I am encouraged by Mr. [Bruce] Grego and Ms. [Claire] Fortier's willingness to tackle this vexing problem because our future depends on radically changing the transportation scene as it has always been endured.

Gloria Hartoonian, South Lake Tahoe

LTUSD cuts 10 jobs for 2011-12; more possible

By Kathryn Reed

A counselor and two teachers at South Tahoe Middle School, two teachers at South Tahoe High School, two custodians, a teacher at the Independent Learning Academy, the human resources director, the English learner coordinator. Those are all the positions slashed Tuesday night from the Lake Tahoe Unified School District's payroll for 2011-12.

The cuts will save the district $840,000.

Lake Tahoe Unified, like all districts in California, is grappling with state take-aways that are making it difficult to continue providing the services parents, the community and educators want and expect.

The district's approach has been to keep as many programs and people as possible. Class-size reduction is a luxury in most

districts. LTUSD has stuck with the program, believing children learn better when the student to teacher ratio is reduced.

If LTUSD were to completely eliminate class-size reduction, it would mean 18 teachers without jobs.

“Our mission is to keep as many people as possible,” Jim Watson, HR director, told *Lake Tahoe News* after the Feb. 8 meeting. “Employment is not only good for the community, it’s good for the kids because it returns programs (to the schools) we believe make a difference.”

But on the chopping block that night was his job. He admits to having mixed emotions about retiring after spending 37 years in California’s education system.

As dreary as the news was, in many ways the emotional part is just beginning. Now it’s time for district officials to look at who has turned in their paperwork to retire, balance that information against the cuts the board made Tuesday and fill in names for the positions that were eliminated.

At the March 1 special board meeting the names of the people increasing South Lake Tahoe’s 17 percent unemployment rate are likely to be known. State law mandates certificated employees be notified by March 15 if they will be receiving a pink slip.

Between now and then the principals at the middle and high schools will be looking at master schedules to see what classes are cut along with the positions.

Before the board voted unanimously for the cuts, STMS counselor JoAnn Hernandez expressed what life for her and colleague Roy Benavidez is like.

She questioned how the school of 860 students would cope with one counselor. She wonders what happens to the 100 special education students. She spoke of the 150 students each

trimester who receive extra counseling because they have received a D or an F.

Nevada resident Kathy Percival told the board the expense of paying for her son to attend South Tahoe High is worth it, but stressed the need to keep the focus on quality teachers and programs. She told the board shortening the school year should not be an option.

But it is.

However, because it is something that must be negotiated with the unions, the board cannot automatically vote on it. The same goes for implementing furlough days. State law allows the district to go from 180 to 175 days.

LTUSD can save $100,000 for each day classes are not in session and teachers are not on campus.

Two things were stressed Tuesday night. One, is the 2012-13 cuts will be more painful if voters do not approve extending the taxes that will likely be on the June ballot. LTUSD faces another 10.5 positions being cut in a worst-case scenario.

The other fact that kept being reiterated is how districts cannot spend money however they want. Although the state in recent years has offered more flexibility with categorical funds, plenty of strings remain.

The district cannot take money from the voter approved Measure G or any of the matching state grant dollars to use them for items other than building facilities. Likewise, developers' fees have criteria for how they are spent. That is why the high school can get lights and a refurbished football field for next season – the district's share is from developers' fees.

CFO Deb Yates said in her 28 years in the profession she has never seen the financial picture so bleak.

“I’ve absolutely never seen anything close to the level of reductions we are looking at and that we’ve sustained,” Yates said.

The problems for school districts stem from the state reducing what it pays per student as well other cutbacks. The state is giving LTUSD almost 20 percent less than what it is owed. This equates to $4.625 million for the 2011-12 school year, $4.2 million this school year, and nearly $4.5 million for 2009-10.

“Think what we could do with that kind of money,” Yates said.

Lakeview Commons back on track for 2011 completion

By Kathryn Reed

B.J. Sullivan, president of Clark & Sullivan Builders, assured the South Lake Tahoe City Council his company would have Lakeview Commons done by October.

Last fall his firm successfully sued to have work on the multimillion dollar project at El Dorado Beach stopped, citing a flawed bid process.

Clark & Sullivan won again, so to speak, on Tuesday when the council unanimously decided to award the contract to the Sparks company. Their bid is $400,000 higher than Reeve-Knight’s, the original contractor selected for the project, for a total of $4,897,837.



Lakeview Commons -- what it should look like in eight months.

However, the bid comes in below the $6 million allocated by California Tahoe Conservancy to pay for the upgrades to the site, which include putting in a boathouse for non-motorized watercraft, restrooms, terraced landscaping, an invasive aquatic species decontamination station, improved walkways, and an improved picnic area all along the lakefront across from Campground by the Lake.

“I’m not sure if we rebid it, if we would get a lower bid,” city engineer Jim Marino told the council Feb. 8.

That was the council’s other option – to start all over. But that option was not discussed by the council.

Also part of Tuesday’s decision was signing off on the settlement agreement with Reeve-Knight, the firm that did the initial work on the project. They will be paid $142,500 for that work. This comes out of the CTC grant.

According to City Attorney Patrick Enright, the company wanted about $50,000 more than that.

Councilmember Angela Swanson asked if the public would have access to the area as work is completed. Sullivan said that has not been looked at, but will be considered as work begins in May.

Prescribed burn near Zephyr Cove

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will be conducting prescribed fire operations on the west side of Highway 50 just north of Zephyr Cove Beach on Feb. 9. The project is approximately 3 acres.

Residents and travelers can expect to see smoke from prescribed fire project areas.

State and local fire management agencies may also be conducting prescribed fire work during this period.

This and other prescribed fire projects are designed to reduce wildfire risks to communities and critical resources. Smoke management is part of every prescribed fire burn plan, and efforts will be taken to reduce actual or potential smoke impacts on community areas.

South Tahoe Planning

Commission appointed

It took three rounds of voting for the South Lake Tahoe City Council to decide on five members to be on the city's Planning Commission.

Four people were seated on the first ballot – Michael Berg, Joy Curry, Austin Sass and Tami Wallace.

The second round was to break a five-way tie between Michael Beschoff, Judy Brown, Jonnie Crawford, Adrian Gooch and Mort Meiers. That vote saw Brown and Crawford prevail.

Ultimately the council voted Brown, a former council member and mayor of South Lake Tahoe, to be on the commission instead of sitting Commissioner Crawford.

The commission will begin its duties Feb. 11. The existing commission's last meeting is Feb. 10.

The council had delayed the appointments in hopes of attracting more candidates. Originally five people had applied for the five-member board. This time around the council had 11 people to choose from.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Grizzlies fired up for last games on home ice

By Ted Parkhill

This past weekend the Tahoe Grizzlies Pee Wees (ages 11-12)

were on the road to Vacaville and San Jose. On Saturday the Grizzlies faced the Vacaville Jets. It was end-to-end action for both teams and in the middle of the third period it was tied 3–3.

The line of Spencer Lloyd, No. 24 left wing of Reno. and Katie Sonntag, No. 16 right wing of South Lake Tahoe, that was on fire. Lloyd had two goals and Sonntag had two assists.

However, the Jets are a strong team which they proved by scoring two late goals in the third period to win 5-3. That was the final meeting of regular season play against the Jets; which the Grizzlies ended up 2-1-1.

The tough outcome on Saturday did not stop the Pee Wees. The Grizzlies came out with a roar on Sunday in San Jose.

The Junior Sharks scored first, but it was then quickly tied by the Grizzlies. The Sharks went ahead again but it was again tied by the Grizzlies. After that the Grizzlies stayed on the attack and ended up winning 7–2.

Incredibly, all seven goals were scored by seven players. Edward Parkhill, No. 7 right wing of Incline Village, was the point leader in Sunday’s game with a goal and two assists.

With this win the Grizzlies are guaranteed fourth place overall. They still have four more regular season games.

The Tahoe Grizzlies Squirts (ages 9-10) were also on the road in San Jose on Saturday. They lost their first regular season game to the Junior Sharks. The Sharks scored early and often to win 7–2.

The Squirts, like the Pee Wees, did not let the loss affect them. On Sunday they faced the Capital Thunder in Roseville and it was Roseville that heard the thunder. The Grizzlies triumphed over Roseville 4–2.

Zach Dill, No. 19 center of South Lake Tahoe, led the weekend

with three points. Max Mueller, No. 10 defenseman from South Lake Tahoe, scored his first goal as a travel hockey player.

This weekend the Tahoe Grizzlies Pee Wees and the Squirts have their last regular season games at home. They host the Cupertino Cougars for a doubleheader Saturday and Sunday.

The games are at the South Lake Tahoe Ice Arena (1176 Rufus Allen Blvd.). Admission is always free.

Ted Parkhill is with the South Tahoe Amateur Hockey Association.

Caltrans to host meeting about Hwy. 28 work in Tahoe Vista

On Feb. 9, Caltrans will have a drop-in style open house for residents of Tahoe Vista, local officials and other interested parties to discuss Highway 28 lane reconfiguration plans and receive comments. Caltrans staff will be on hand to answer questions about the project.

The open house will be from 4-7pm at Kings Beach Elementary School, 8125 Steelhead St., Kings Beach.

Comment forms will be available at the open house. Comments may also be made online or sent to the Caltrans Project Manager, Mike Cook at 703 B St/, Marysville, CA 95901. All comments must be received by March 2.

Caltrans is proposing a striping reconfiguration to reduce the number of through lanes on Highway 28 for about one half mile

between National Avenue and Beach Street in Tahoe Vista. This will maintain parking opportunities on the lake-side of the highway while still providing bike lanes. There would be safety benefits as well with a continuous median turning lane provided. The existing passing lane for westbound traffic, west of National Avenue, would still be in place.

Currently there are four lanes in Tahoe Vista from National Avenue to the Highway 267 intersection. The current construction plans do not change the number of lanes, but do convert the existing 8-foot wide paved shoulders into bike lanes. Because parking will be prohibited in the bike lanes, this will reduce parking opportunities for residents, businesses and visitors.

Caltrans will continue road work in May to improve stormwater drainage to help protect lake water quality, as well as increase traffic safety and access for bicycles.

Tahoe artist moves studio to winery for the weekend

Lake Tahoe fine artist Reds Regan will be performing a live painting production and displaying his primitive contemporary artwork at m2 Winery during the Wine and Chocolate Weekend in Lodi.

Regan is exhibiting his internationally recognized acrylic paintings at the winery and will be undertaking a live painting production demonstrating his ambidextrous painting style throughout the weekend. He will begin with a blank 10-foot canvas on Saturday and the piece will be nearly complete by Sunday evening.



Reds Regan will be painting in Lodi this weekend. Photo/Provided

The event is Feb. 12-13 from 11am-4pm at 1376 East Turner Road, Lodi.

Forty other Lodi appellation wineries will be pairing handcrafted wines with decadent chocolate delights throughout the Wine and Chocolate Weekend.

For more information about Regan's artwork, go online or call (530) 577.5298.

Californians fear having to sell land if Conservation Act is axed

By Loretta Kalb, Sacramento Bee

In some ways, Gov. Jerry Brown's proposed elimination of California's Land Conservation Act is just one more symbol of the state's great budget disaster.

For many agricultural advocates, the consequences of abandoning a long-held strategy to preserve farmland and open space go well beyond the state's projected $25.4 billion deficit.

Supporters say eliminating the 46-year-old law – commonly known as the Williamson Act – will diminish an important source of environmental protection for 16.5 million acres and increase development pressure on farmers and ranchers.

The Williamson Act enables counties to contract with farmers, ranchers and other landowners, generally for 10-year terms, to keep the property taxes on their acreage lower. In exchange, the owners agree to keep the land out of development.

Historically, the state has provided funds to the counties to offset their property tax losses. If the program goes away, some landowners question their ability to continue operating their farms and ranches in the face of higher property taxes.

Read the whole story