Judge: Garrido competent to stand trial

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

The judge in the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnap case today ruled that Phillip Garrido is mentally competent to face trial in her 1991 abduction.

El Dorado Superior Court Judge Douglas Phimister said, “The defendant is in fact competent to stand trial.”

He set the next hearing the case for Feb. 28.

Read the whole story

Suspect in principal shooting had been fired that day

By Peter Hecht and Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

Custodian John Luebbers, angry after being fired, has confessed to killing Placerville school principal Sam LaCara, police said today.

Capt. Mike Scott of the Placerville Police department said that Luebbers, 44, confessed that he shot and killed LaCara on Wednesday.

Luebbers allegedly went home to get a gun after he was fired Wednesday morning by the principal.

LaCara was gunned down in his office shortly after 10:30 a.m.

Wednesday at Louisiana Schnell School. LaCara, 50, was shot in the chest.

Read the whole story

Snowshoe tour at Sugar Pine Point

On Feb. 12 at 11am is a free snowshoe tour at Sugar Pine Point State Park, the lakefront and the Hellman-Ehrman Mansion estate.

It starts near the restrooms in the day-use side of the park (lakeside entrance off Highway 89). Parking fee is $8. For more information, go online.

Garrido’s competency subject of Thursday hearing

By Sam Stanton, Sacramento Bee

His own lawyer has said he may be mentally ill, that he hears the voices of angels who live underground speaking to him.

He has told people he invented a special box to control sound with his mind, and he sought out the FBI before his arrest to discuss mind control.

As crazy as that sounds, it may not mean Phillip Garrido is

mentally incompetent to stand trial in the Jaycee Lee Dugard kidnap.

A competency trial on the matter is tentatively set for Feb. 28, but that may not be held. Lawyers on both sides of the case are discussing if the competency trial is necessary and could agree Garrido is competent, a move that would mean his criminal trial can go forward.

A hearing to weigh the matter is set for today in El Dorado Superior Court. Lawyers in the case would not comment Wednesday.

Read the whole story

Ski report: Find the groomers



Light winds are expected today, with highs in the 30s.

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

Principal, gunman were

friends; motive in killing unknown

By Peter Hecht, Kim Minugh, Gina Kim and Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Only last Sunday, the two golfing buddies spent the day together on the course. But on Wednesday, a janitor at a Placerville elementary school confronted his friend, the principal, with a gun, police said.

In a flash of fire, Principal Sam LaCara of Louisiana Schnell School lay mortally wounded. Within an hour, the married father of three daughters, a respected school administrator known for his sense of humor and love of sports, died at Marshall Medical Center in Placerville.

“It’s a tragedy for Placerville and our entire society,” Police Chief George Nielsen declared at an afternoon news conference, in which he announced that a suspect – the janitor – had been arrested and that all the school’s children were safe.

LaCara was gunned down shortly after 10:30 a.m. in his office on the wooded campus for kindergartners to fifth-graders near nature trails and the scenic drive to Apple Hill.

Worried parents rushed to pick up, hug and reassure their children after authorities had them evacuated in El Dorado Transit buses to the El Dorado County Fairgrounds.

“All the children are safe,” said a recording at the offices of the Placerville Union School District.

Nielsen said at least one student may have witnessed the shooting as LaCara, 50, was struck down by a gunshot to his upper chest.

The alleged gunman, identified by police as janitor John Luebbers, 44, was arrested by sheriff's deputies without incident at his home in the town of El Dorado.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Chipping away at community colleges

By George Skelton, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO — California's community colleges always have been among the best bargains in America. But too often these days that's like saying land's cheap on Mars.

Price doesn't matter much if the product isn't available.

Like a lot of institutions that rely on tax dollars, California's community college system has been hit hard. And that means students suffer.

They're getting less for more.

Gov. Jerry Brown is proposing to increase student fees by $10 per unit, from $26 to $36. That would raise $110 million to partly offset a $400-million state funding cut Brown advocates for community colleges, leaving them with $3.6 billion in state money, a 10% trim.

The governor essentially wants to shift that $400 million to K-12 schools. They're more popular with the public, and their biggest union — the California Teachers Assn. — is arguably the most powerful lobby in Sacramento.

Brown’s political strategy is simple: He’s protecting K-12 schools from more whacks for now. But he’s warning that K-12 cuts will resume if voters don’t approve his proposed extension of temporary tax hikes in June. The teachers union presumably will be highly motivated to help bankroll his ballot campaign if the Legislature allows the special election.

Read the whole story

Red Cross looking for volunteers

The American Red Cross is recruiting volunteers for the Tahoe-Truckee area. There are openings for Disaster Action Team members, instructors, outreach, special events, fund development, public affairs and leadership positions.

The Capital Region Chapter responded to more than 400 local disasters throughout our 11 county area last year, providing emergency shelter, food, clothing and supplies. Each year local Red Cross instructors certify nearly 60,000 people in CPR/AED, first aid, water safety, lifeguard training and disaster preparedness classes.

To begin training and join our local American Red Cross team, contact Lynn Felsch, Emergency Service Coordinator at (530) 391.8234 felschl@sacsierraredcross.org.

Sandoval advocates modernizing gaming regulations

By Cy Ryan, Las Vegas Sun

CARSON CITY – Tucked away in one paragraph of his 22-page State of the State address, non-gambler Gov. Brian Sandoval is calling for a modernization of regulations over the casino industry.

Sandoval says Nevada must remain the "undisputed leader in the gaming economy." Some regulations have been on the books since the 1970s and don't include technology and innovations developed since then, he said.

Mark Lipparelli, chairman of the Nevada Gaming Control Board, said the state must "streamline" the process to deal with technology that has evolved.

For instance, he said some existing regulations make it impossible to test the software, technology and new machines that become available. As technology has advanced, he said the regulations failed to keep pace.

Read the whole story

Volunteer opportunities for

Genoa Cowboy Poetry Fest

Genoa and the Carson Valley Arts Council are looking for volunteers to assist with the 2011 Genoa Cowboy Poetry and Music Festival, taking place in Genoa May 5-8. A variety of positions are available for volunteers to work at the Cowboy Festival. The event will feature nationally known Cowboy poets and musicians, workshops, western art, cowboy food, trail ride, and a Mother's Day brunch and concert.

Entertainers include David John and the Comstock Cowboys, Dennis Golden, Tom Weatherby, Sourdough Slim, Dave Stamey, Belinda Gail, Doris Dailey, Wylie & The Wild West, Paul Zarzyski, Richard Elloyan, Cody & Kaye, the Old West Trio, All Hat No Cattle, and the Saddle Cats.

Those interested in applying must submit a volunteer form, available at the Town of Genoa, the Carson Valley Arts Council or online. Town offices are located at 2289 Main St. in Genoa, and the CVAC is at 1572 Highway 395 in Minden. Completed forms may be submitted via mail to: Town of Genoa Cowboy Festival, P. O. Box 14, Genoa, NV 89411 or faxed to (775) 782.2779.

For more information on the festival and to purchase tickets online visit the Genoa Cowboy Poetry and Music Festival website at www.cowboypoetrygenoa.com. Information and tickets are also available by contacting the Town of Genoa offices at 775-782-8696 or Carson Valley Arts Council at 775-782-8207.