Barrel tasting provides sneak peak at next wine vintage

By Kathryn Reed

SOMERSET – It was one of those only in El Dorado County days. Schussing through fresh powder in the morning at Sierra-at-Tahoe, drinking from the barrel in the afternoon at foothill wineries.

With 26 wineries to choose from for the annual Bring out the Barrel wine tasting event, we knew we couldn't hit them all in a day – or even two. But the three we managed to visit Sunday we'd go back to without an event to lure us there.



Richard Stading explains what's in the barrel at Auriga. Photos/Kathryn Reed

What makes this weekend special is being able to taste from the barrel to know what is on the horizon. Some of the wineries sell futures. This means paying for the bottles now at usually a reduced rate compared to what it will be once it is released. It can be a gamble, or it can be a great investment.

At Cantiga Wineworks, it was all about education on this last weekend of January. No futures were even available.

“The education component is key in our wine style,” owner Richard Rorden said. “We are using this to show wine as it ages.”

Plenty of people hovered around the barrels containing samples of the 2008 and 2010 Zinfandel. To some, a full glass or a bottle would have been fine to have right then.

But that’s not what Rorden and his wife, Christine, are about. Their philosophy is to embrace the European-style of winemaking, where the fruit remains in the barrel longer. It takes about five years before they are satisfied and will put their wines in a bottle.

“Wine needs acidity. Without it, it is hard to pair with food,” Rorden said.

Creating wine that goes well with food is more important to Cantiga than having people open a bottle and just drink. Food is such an integral part of their wine that even on non-event occasions there is food out for people to sample with the wine.

On this special barrel tasting weekend, most wineries had something to share with guests besides wine.

At Auriga Wine Cellars, which has moved its tasting facility to Pleasant Valley Road, a pasta dish is being paired with the Tuscan blend that is dominated by Sangiovese.

The Tuscan will be bottled in April and tastes ready now.

“I don’t see it changing much,” owner Richard Stading said of the Tuscan. “A lot of times in the barrel it’s really yummy and then in the bottle (people say) this isn’t what I bought. A couple months from now this will not change.”

The barrel tasting was an opportunity for Richard and Diane Stading to show off the larger tasting area. This summer they expect to have special events on the grassy lawn out back.

They picked up more than a dozen new club members during the two-day event, so that made it profitable beyond the sound of the cash register ringing.

This is the fourth year of Bring out the Barrel, which is put on by the El Dorado Winery Association. And it’s the first year it has sold out. Last year 1,200 tickets were sold, this year 2,000.

Elliot Graham at Busby Cellars said it was wall-to-wall people at the tasting room Saturday afternoon. He and his wife, Sherrie, and their workers were doing a brisk business Sunday, too.

Overall, he said things have been steady despite the economy, with sales increasing last year. He attributes this partly to people never stop drinking wine, and smaller wineries like Busby that produce 2,000 cases a year don’t have the distribution costs others have.

The next big event in the El Dorado County wine region is Passport Weekend, the last weekend of March and first weekend of April. This, too, can sell out.

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Services scheduled for Vee

Gay

Services for Vee Gay will be at Our Lady of Tahoe Catholic Church in Zephyr Cove on Feb. 12 at 10:30am.

A reception immediately following the service will be at Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course in Stateline.

Nevada bear hunt debate rages on

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

Details of the contentious plan to conduct Nevada's first black bear hunt beginning next summer are set to be finalized Friday in Las Vegas, with little sign rancorous debate over the plan is near an end.

The Nevada Board of Wildlife Commissioners, which unanimously approved a hunt Dec. 4 in Reno, is scheduled to adopt harvest numbers, season dates and other specifics.

Chris Healy, spokesman for the Nevada Department of Wildlife, said people continue to voice strong feelings about the hunt, with many opposed.

"Lots of people have made their thoughts known," Healy said. "The majority of input has been 'don't hunt the bears,' but we've also had input supporting the hunt."

As proposed, a hunt lasting from late August through late December would allow a maximum of 20 bears, no more than six of them females, to be killed. Once six females are killed,

the hunt would be halted regardless if the full 20 have yet to be harvested, Healy said.

Dogs could be used in the hunt, as could any legal weapons, including rifles, shotguns and bows. Sows with cubs could not be hunted, and killing a cub would be illegal. Hunters would have to provide a skull and hide, with evidence of sex naturally attached, to the Department of Wildlife for inspection within 72 hours of killing a bear.

Bear hunting would be permitted across a swatch of western Nevada, including near Lake Tahoe and in parts of Douglas, Storey, Lyon and Mineral counties.

Read the whole story

Principal shot to death in Placerville

By Kim Minugh and Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

The principal at Louisiana Schnell Elementary School in Placerville was shot to death today in his office on campus.

Sam LaCara, 50, died at Marshall Hospital from a single gunshot wound, said Placerville Police Chief George Nielsen.

The suspected shooter has been identified as John Luebbers, 43, a custodian at the school. Luebbers has been arrested.

The shooting was reported to emergency personnel about 10:40 this morning.

Marinas said “every available law enforcement” has been sent

to the school to help secure the scene.

Read the whole story

Snow train to North Shore being talked about

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Over its nearly 70-year run, the Denver Ski Train helped link hundreds of thousands of city dwellers with Colorado's rich winter sport assets.

Squaw Valley USA's new president and CEO, Andy Wirth, likes the idea of offering San Francisco and Sacramento area residents a mass transit option for travel to Lake Tahoe.

So he has begun talking to operators of Northstar and other North Lake Tahoe resorts about a ski train from the Bay Area to Truckee.

"There is great promise," said Wirth, who five months into his new job is up to his elbows overhauling his resort.

Passenger rail would give visitors to the Sierra Nevada a viable – even entertaining – option to navigating roads, often in inhospitable weather.

For those who might not want to wait for Wirth's idea to come to fruition, Amtrak already operates once-a-day passenger service along the I-80 corridor. The eastbound California Zephyr begins in Emeryville. Roughly 52 hours later it terminates in Chicago. Truckee is one of the stops.

Read the whole story

Despite loss in Fresno, Tahoe Grizzlies remain in first place

By Tom Parkhill

This past weekend the Tahoe Grizzlies Pee Wees (ages 11-12) were on the road to Fresno. They were set to take on the Falcons who they had previously beat 13-1 and 3-0 in their two meetings in South Lake Tahoe in November. The game on Saturday was tied, but then the Falcons prevailed by scoring three short-handed goals in a row to beat the Grizzlies 6–3.

The Grizzlies came out of hibernation on Sunday morning and managed to tie the second game 4–4. The Falcons scored another two goals short-handed).

With that extra point earned from the tie the Grizzlies are only two points away from securing a playoff berth. They remain in first place of their division based on their overall win percentage.

This weekend the Tahoe Grizzlies Pee Wees are headed to Vacaville and San Jose for two games against the Vacaville Jets and the San Jose Junior Sharks.

The undefeated Tahoe Grizzlies Squirts are also on the road in San Jose against the Junior Sharks on Saturday and on Sunday they face the Capital Thunder in Roseville.

The next home games are Feb. 12-13 at South Lake Tahoe Ice

Arena (1176 Rufus Allen Blvd.). Admission is always free to all hockey fans.

Tom Parkhill is with the South Tahoe Amateur Hockey Association.

Ski report: Dress in layers



It’s going to be cold on the slopes today.

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

Placer County GOP Lincoln Reagan Dinner

Rep. Tom McClintock will be the keynote speaker at the annual Placer County Republican Party Lincoln Reagan Dinner on Feb. 12.

The Republican candidates for the 4th Assembly District special election are also on the agenda.

The event is from 6:30-8:30pm at the Timber Creek Ballroom at Sun City in Roseville. Cost is $60/person, $110/couple in

advance.

For more information, call (916) 672.8446.

Cocaine making resurgence in South Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

Watching the suspect make his deliveries around South Lake Tahoe, his clientele runs the gamut of residents from moms to construction workers to the seedier elements of town to cooks.

“This guy had established a little network,” Jeff Catchings, commander with South Lake El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team, told *Lake Tahoe News*. “There was no shortage of people waiting to buy from him.”

He is talking about Isidro Roberto Rojas Guzman, 44, of South Lake Tahoe. He was booked into El Dorado County Jail in South Tahoe last week on charges of selling cocaine.

“The amount of cocaine was significant. He probably just got a kilo and was down to 10 ounces or so. He had broken it in grams, eight balls and ounces,” Catchings said.

Although this is Guzman’s first arrest in the city, he has prior arrests for sales of narcotics in other California cities and in Nevada, Catchings said. His family is well known to law enforcement in the area. They get arrested and deported.

“For whatever reason they keep coming back to Tahoe,” Catchings said of the family.

In the 1980s, cocaine was the drug of choice in Tahoe for people selling and using. It's gaining in popularity again as the price drops below what meth can be bought for on the street.

Catchings said consumption is a big deal locally. When it comes to SLEDNET officers seizing narcotics "cocaine is the highest numbers-wise."

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Lake Tahoe Community College's Rail Jam is Feb. 12 from 2pm-midnight.

• South Tahoe Middle School has a new website.

• Lake Tahoe Community College will have the first round of interviews for the next president on April 18-20. The board will interview the finalists May 11-13.

• Washoe County Regional Parks and Open Space has trail maps online. Look for "Park Trail Map" on the left side of the home page.

• Heart disease is the No. 1 killer of women. Help raise awareness and support for women's heart health by wearing red on National Wear Red Day, Feb. 4.