Wet winter quenching California's thirst

By Jim Carlton, Wall Street Journal

After three years of debilitating drought, California appears headed into a second straight wet year, giving a boost to ski resorts, farms and communities that languished during the dry spell in the fiscally troubled state.

Since California's rainy season began Oct. 1, the state has received roughly double the mountain snowfall it normally gets, according to state estimates.

That means the rainy season is off to its best start in at least five years, with 16 of California's 24 major reservoirs equipped with flood controls already beginning to release water so they can take on spring runoff, state water officials say.



South Lake Tahoe residents have been doing plenty of shoveling and blowing this winter. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The bounty is providing a shot in the arm to many local economies across California, the nation’s most populous state, which is struggling to recover from the recession.

Combined with last year’s abundant rainfall, officials of some water districts, including the Santa Clara Valley Water District in San Jose, Calif., have dropped mandatory rationing restrictions. That particularly helps farming-related businesses, which are more dependent on water than most other parts of the economy, economists say.

Ski resorts are reporting visits and revenue above what they had anticipated, said Bob Roberts, executive director of the California Ski Industry Association.

Read the whole story

STHS puts on ‘Sound of Music’

“The Sound of Music” will be performed Jan. 27-30 in the South Tahoe Middle School multipurpose Room.

Performances begin at 7pm. Thursday-Saturday, with a matinee on Jan. 30 at 2pm.

The cast is composed primarily of South Tahoe High School students, with the addition of several talented younger students cast as the Von Trapp children.

Tickets will be available at the door for $12; seniors and students cost $6.

The production is at the middle school while the high school theater is under construction.

Opinion: Civility starts with Congress

By Jackie Speier

The news that Rep. Gabrielle Giffords had been shot in the head hit me in the stomach – complete nausea. My grief over a fallen colleague and those who died in the gun assault brought back the sensations of a jungle runway 32 years ago, when I lay in a pool of my own blood, covered with ants, expecting to die.

I pray that Giffords will be able to read this soon or that I might have the chance to read it to her. I have much to say.

As a legal aide to Rep. Leo Ryan, D-San Mateo, in 1978, I held idealistic thoughts of what could be done in the name of justice. In November 1978, I joined Ryan on a fact-finding mission to Jonestown, Guyana. We were responding to rumors – ultimately determined to be fact – that relatives of the congressman's Bay Area constituents were being held against their will by a cult leader, the Rev. Jim Jones. Many members of Jones' Peoples Temple wanted to return with us to the United States. The outcome has been well documented in news accounts, books and movies. We were about to board our plane back home when a truck full of Jones' gunmen burst through the thick jungle cover. Shots rang out. I hid behind the wheel of the plane and played dead. Someone shot me five times at point-blank range.

I called the congressman's name. There was no answer. Later I was told he had been riddled with 45 bullets.

My next life started during those 22 hours on my back on the

runway, unable to move and barely able to think of anything other than this was how my dreams were to end at the age of 28.

Jackie Speier represents San Mateo County and portions of San Francisco in the House of Representatives.

Read the whole story

South Tahoe employees consider workplace average

By Kathryn Reed

A C-plus – that's the grade South Lake City employees gave their employer and overall work environment.

City Manager Tony O'Rourke is not surprised by the results of the survey 92 percent of the 198 employees took in early December. Results are being disseminated to staff this week, with directors having received the report late last week.

Of the 72 questions, the one receiving the lowest overall rating was: City management considers the interest of employees when changes are made in the city that affects my work. Sixty-seven percent disagreed, while 5 percent agreed with the statement.

"Anything that received less than 50 percent needs addressing," O'Rourke said.

He wants change to be a collaborative effort between staff and management.

What role his management style played into the results would be hard to ascertain. When the survey was taken Dec. 6-7 he had been at the helm for four months – enough time to influence opinions, not enough to be responsible for engrained beliefs/attitudes.

The firm doing the analysis wrote, “Particularly in these economic times, adequate staffing levels is an enormous challenge and rarely do we find organizations where employees feel the staffing is adequate. Limited staff and high demand for services can also mean the leadership time and attention required for effective two-way communication and inclusive decision making and collaboration across departments can wane. This ultimately affects morale and productivity as evident in the results of the assessment and reflected in the written comments.”

In the 45-year history of the city, no employee survey has been taken before. O’Rourke wants to use this one prepared by Alta Mesa Group as a benchmark. His plan to conduct a survey each year, see if weaknesses have been addressed and what new issues may need to be resolved.

“We need to treat employees as well as we treat the customers,” O’Rourke said. His mantra since Day 1 has been all about providing quality service, treating customers (aka the public) with respect.

The areas city employees had the highest remarks for were:

• I feel a high degree of responsibility for the work I do;

• I work in an environment that is free from drugs and alcohol;

• I have the skills and knowledge necessary to perform my job;

• I know what is expected of me in my job;

• The people in my work group work hard to do quality work;

• I have a great sense of personal satisfaction when I perform my job;

• Employees are treated equally regardless of race, national origin, age, gender, sexual preference, marital status, physical handicap, medical condition, veteran status, or religious affiliation.

The areas people had the lowest remarks for were:

• My department is adequately staffed;

• Suggestions for improvement are taken seriously;

• City management considers the interest of employees when changes are made in the city that affect my work;

• City management promotes a team environment within and among departments;

• City management sets attainable goals;

• In general, this organization is better to work for now than it was a year ago;

• City management genuinely cares about employees' welfare.

How the 57 supervisors-managers responded compared to the 126 line employees was about the same. Usually management has a higher regard for the institution.

The consultant wrote, "A focus on communication, leadership and citywide policy issues amongst city managers and supervisors may create a significant opportunity for improvement in the organization, and will likely be noticed by line employees."

Underlining the issue with communication is the fact 75 percent of employees say they understand issues the city faces, but only 19 percent trust what the city tells them.

Only 12 percent believe management takes their suggestions seriously. Twenty-one percent feel comfortable saying what they think.

For the question: City policies and standards are applied consistently to all employees – 57 percent disagreed and 16 percent agreed.

The City Council on Jan. 25 will have this survey and the community survey at its disposal while discussing the strategic plan.

“The council will have to prioritize services,” O’Rourke said. “I want the process to be public and transparent. It needs to be tied to action plans and assessments.”

MontBleu focusing on showroom acts after lackluster ’10

By Mel Shields, Sacramento Bee

The MontBleu on Lake Tahoe’s South Shore seems to be getting more active entertainment-wise this year. Changes have been made, and the showroom, dark most of last year (including weekends) is lighting up more often in 2011.

The bookings are mostly edgy, with nothing middle of the road. This week, for instance, features one entertainer who has been attributed by rappers as one of their major influences, along with one of the most famous of all those rappers.

George Clinton and his Parliament Funkadelic appear Jan. 30. Clinton is undoubtedly one of the major innovators of what has come to be known as funk music, along with James Brown and Sly

Stone. He began his musical career forming a doo-wop group, along the line of Frankie Lymon and the Teenagers, calling them the Parliaments.

Then came the years of the P-Funk All-Stars and groundbreaking albums like “Loopzilla” and “Atomic Dog.”

Read the whole story

Fundraiser for South Tahoe’s Hudson family

A fundraiser for the Hudson family will be Jan. 31 fro 5-8pm in the multipurpose room at South Tahoe Middle School.

Scott Hudson was a teacher at the school who died earlier this month.

Dinner will from 5-7pm, with silent auction from 7-8pm.

Advance tickets are $10 adults, $5 children under 8 and seniors, $25 for a family; at the door the cost goes up $5. Tickets are available at the district office at 1021 Al Tahoe Blvd. Make checks payable to Marsha Hudson. An account has been set up at U.S. Bank.

For more information, call (530) 541.6404.

TRPA adds member to Governing Board

Leo Drozdoff, director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources Director, announced today that Steve Robinson will serve as his designee on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency's Governing Board.

Robinson served as the transition director from outgoing

"I have followed TRPA for about 30 years – since college," Robinson said in a press release. "It is an honor to be selected to serve on its board."

Prior to working for Gov. Jim Gibbons, he worked in Gov. Kenny Guinn's office from 2003 to 2007, after having served as Nevada State Forester and director of the National Interagency Fire Center. In his capacity as deputy chief of staff, he also oversaw all environmental permitting and regulatory activities. In addition, he supervised the governor's Washington, D.C., office and was Guinn's staff counsel to the Western Governors Association.

Fundraiser for Austin's House

Celebrate Mardi Gras in Minden on March 4 benefits Austin's House. The third annual Mardi Gras Magic Dinner & Dance is at the Carson Valley Inn.

This fundraiser will recreate the party atmosphere of New Orleans on Fat Tuesday with food, music, dancing, raffle prizes and a Grand Prize drawing for a trip to The Big Easy.

The evening starts at 6pm with a cocktail hour. Then feast on a Cajun buffet dinner featuring peel and eat shrimp, chicken gumbo, blackened fish, sausage steamed in beer, shrimp etouffee and smoked rib eye roast with all of the trimmings.

After dinner, the Mardi Gras Magic party hits full stride with dancing music provided by Fabrizio. Raffle prizes will be drawn every 15 minutes. The silent auction features donated prizes from local businesses.

Tickets are $50. Tables of 10 are available for $500. Only 200 tickets will be sold. Call Austin's House at (775) 267.6711 to order your tickets. Visa and MasterCard are accepted.

Austin's House is the only emergency children's shelter in rural Northern Nevada.

Records fall, cooler temps returning this week in Tahoe

More records fell on Monday as the Lake Tahoe area baked under a hot sun.

For the second day in a row South Lake Tahoe set a record. The high of 61 degrees Jan. 17 was three degrees hotter than the previous record set in 1961.

Reno's record high for Jan. 17 was 64 set in 1971. On Monday the high was 66.



Warm on Tuesday, normal temps for Lake Tahoe returning for the rest of the week. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Markleeville's high was 69, nine degrees higher than the 1934 record.

Enjoy the unseasonably warm temps today because forecasters with the National Weather Service in Reno are saying it's all going to change overnight. The highs on Wednesday and Thursday are slated to be in the 30s in the Lake Tahoe Basin – what one might call normal for January.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Holland makes podium in snowboardcross

By Elizabeth Karam, U.S. Snowboarding

LA MOLINA, Spain – Lindsey Jacobellis of Stratton Mountain,

Vt., led the U.S. charge winning her third career World Championship gold as the U.S. landed three of six snowboardcross medals Tuesday.

Seth Wescott of Sugarloaf, Maine, and Nate Holland of Squaw Valley also landed on the podium with silver and bronze.

After qualifying second for the finals, Olympic silver medalist Jacobellis was on fire out of the gate nailing all of her starts. As soon as she pulled out of the gate, it was no looking back as she grabbed the hole shot – taking all heats on her road to the finals.

With the win, Jacobellis is tied with the late Karine Ruby of France for the most World Championship victories with three. Ruby won four World Championship medals over the course of her career.

In the men's race, Australia's World Cup leader Alex Pullin was crowned champion, while the United States swept second and third. Two-time Olympic champion Wescott earned his fourth career World Championships medal – the most of any SBX rider, while six-time X Games champ Holland picked up his second bronze.

"At the start I looked across, we [Wescott and Holland] were at opposite ends of the gate and I yelled 'shake and bake Wescott,'" said Holland. "We've done this so many times and it's always a pleasure to ride with him and shake and bake."

Wescott battled hard with Pullin in both the quarterfinals and semifinals trading spots with the Aussie taking the quarterfinals and Wescott the semifinals – both advancing to the big final. In the end, Pullin took charge dominating the finals run and crossing the finish first. Wescott's silver puts him one ahead of France's Xavier de le Rue in career medals.

Holland was second in every heat as he advanced to the finals.

In the semifinals he was matched up with Italy’s Luca Matteoti, with the Italian taking the heat win. However, the big final was a different story with Holland finishing ahead of Matteoti for the final podium step.

“I have X Games coming up and that’s definitely a major focus of mine,” said Holland of the Winter X Games in Aspen Jan. 27-30. “I came out healthy and I’m going to enjoy this podium. I look forward to defending my title at X Games.”

Official results, FIS World Snowboard Championships, La Molina, Spain, Snowboardcross

Men

1. Alex Pullin, Australia

2. Seth Wescott, Sugarloaf, ME

3. Nate Holland, Squaw Valley, CA

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8. Jonathan Cheever, Saugus, MA

26. Alex Deibold, Manchester Center, VT

Women

1. Lindsey Jacobellis, Stratton Mountain, VT

2. Nelly Moenne Loccoz, France

3. Dominque Maltais, Canada