Ski report: Cloudy and warm



It’s going to be cloudy most of today, but temps will be in the 40s.

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

Validity of convention center permits being investigated

By Kathryn Reed

Research is being done by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to figure out where the permits for the would-be convention center project stand.

When the project went into bankruptcy in October 2009 the permits were tolled by TRPA. This means the clock stopped ticking against the three-year validity of the permit while the project was in bankruptcy court.



How many new

documents are needed for the convention center site is being worked out.

The project came out of bankruptcy last month when creditors decided to foreclose on the project, rendering Lake Tahoe Development Company mute.

“If permits are held longer than three years, chances are likely conditions have changed so environmental analysis would be inaccurate,” Julie Regan, spokeswoman with TRPA, told *Lake Tahoe News*. This is one reason permits have an expiration date.

Last week South Lake Tahoe’s city manager met with TRPA’s executive director and chief legal counsel to discuss what changes are possible and what is valid. A decision is likely in the next couple weeks.

“If this project has to go back to square one, we are looking at a four or five year process with new environmental studies. That would be devastating,” City Manager Tony O’Rourke said.

Regan said TRPA wants to work with the city, but also wants to ensure all the legal aspects are covered.

“We don’t see a radical change in the footprint,” O’Rourke said. But he does foresee a more traditional hotel being built.

Most of the creditors have foreclosed on the 11-acre site near Stateline, though this week Owens Financial – the largest creditor – had still not filed the paperwork.

The foreclosure process essentially leaves the second and third tier creditors without anything, while the first tier

are apt to recover some money, but not all that has been sunk into the hole.

For the entity that eventually takes over the project that originally called for a convention center, two hotels, retail and open space it means dealing with fewer people in a more simplified manner.

“Our biggest hurdle is nationally there is a lot of good product already built that you can get cheap,” O’Rourke said. “That is what we are competing with.”

Census: State government revenues decline 31%

Total state government revenue dropped to $1.1 trillion in 2009, a decline of 30.8 percent from $1.6 trillion in 2008, according to the latest findings from the U.S. Census Bureau.

The large decrease in total revenue was mainly caused by the substantial decrease in social insurance trust revenue. Social insurance trust revenue is made up of four categories – public employee retirement, unemployment compensation, workers compensation and other insurance trusts (i.e., Social Security, Medicare, veteran’s life insurance).

State governments received nearly $1.5 trillion in general revenues in 2009, a decrease of 1.4 percent from 2008. General revenue does not include utility, liquor store or insurance trust revenue.

Total taxes collected in 2009 ($715.1 billion), which accounted for 47.9 percent of general revenue, fell by 8.5

percent from $781.6 billion in 2008. This is the first year-to-year decline in tax revenue since 2002.

Federal grants ($477.7 billion) increased 12.9 percent from 2008 to 2009 and accounted for nearly one-third of general revenue.

This annual survey began in 1951. Current findings come from the 2009 Annual Survey of State Government Finances, which reports revenues, expenditures, debt, and cash and security holdings for each state as well as a national summary.

While tax revenue declined substantially, total federal grants to states increased 12.9 percent to $477.7 billion. Federal grants for welfare programs made up 59.3 percent of all federal grants received in 2009 and increased 16.3 percent to $283.3 billion over 2008, compared with 4.3 and 4 percent year-to-year increases in 2008 and 2007, respectively.

General expenditures by state governments rose 3 percent in 2009 over 2008. These expenditures totaled more than $1.5 trillion, with expenditures for education ($562.1 billion), public welfare ($437.5 billion) and health and hospitals ($119.1 billion) representing the top three activities.

State government spending on education totaled more than 40 percent of general expenditures in 15 states led by Georgia (46.1 percent), Utah (45.6 percent) and Alabama(45.3 percent).

State government spending on public welfare was greater than 30 percent of general expenditures in 11 states, led by Minnesota (37.5 percent), Rhode Island (36.5 percent) and Maine (36.1 percent).

The leading states in spending for highways, as a percentage of general expenditures, were Alaska (13.5 percent), North Dakota (13.4 percent) and South Dakota (12.9 percent).

Hawaii (12.3 percent) led the states in spending on public

health and hospitals as a percentage of general expenditures, followed by Connecticut (11.4 percent) and Virginia (10.9 percent).

Sustainable Tahoe putting together expo in September

The basin-wide Tahoe Expo put on by Sustainable Tahoe will showcase possibilities in sustainability for the Lake Tahoe region, with focus on Mobility, Green Commerce, Health and Fitness, and Conservation – spanning three fun and educational. The event is Sept. 9-11.

The weekend will be packed with a diverse activities for individuals and families. Friday includes panel discussions and workshops for business and community leaders, as well as students. Saturday begins basinwide activities (Art & Culture, Water, Meadow, Urban), Water & Rim trail "hikes," and green building tours. Sunday will spotlight the Tour de Tahoe, various electric vehicle and boat demonstrations, and additional activities around the basin (Forest, Maritime, History, River).

Although activities will take place around the entire Tahoe basin, two main stages are planned at the north and south ends of the lake with space to see what's possible, learn how everything works, and experience it for yourself. A number of topics will be discussed by a variety of industry thought leaders, and demonstration tables will be used to help bring these topics to life.

In an effort to reduce the impact on the environment, we commit to making this a zero-waste event. All materials used

will be made from recycled and compostable resources, and recycling will be plentiful. In addition, we'll work with local ski resorts to encourage parking outside of the basin, with full alternative transit support to get you where you want to go.

The team is currently in the process of scouting speakers, workshops and demonstrations, as well as coordinating activities to span this weekend. Much more information to come as everything unfolds.

Go to the website's contact page, to get involved and for more information.

CASA fundraiser to honor Judge Kingsbury

CASA El Dorado presents the 4th annual CASAblanca at the Lake.

The Feb. 4 event honors El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury. It starts at 6pm at Edgewood Tahoe in Stateline.

The evening will include dinner, wine, live entertainment, silent and live auctions.

Tickets are $125 per person. All proceeds benefit CASA.

RSVP by Jan. 21 to (530) 622.9882 or friends@casaeldorado.org.

Gaines ready to tackle budget, higher ed, building codes

By Kathryn Reed

Change the requirement mandating new residential construction come with sprinklers and create a setting so those who want to graduate in four years from the CSU system can.

Those are two pieces of legislation state Sen. Ted Gaines plans to introduce this session.

Gaines, who represented Lake Tahoe in the state Assembly for four years, was elected to the state Senate last week and sworn in Jan. 6. The Republican from Roseville was still settling into is Sacramento office when *Lake Tahoe News* caught with him by phone this week.



Ted Gaines

One of the major differences between the seats is the size of the district. The Assembly position covered four counties, the Senate 12. Gaines represents people on the Oregon border in Modoc County down to Mammoth Mountain in Mono County.

Despite the increase in territory, he plans to reach out to visit his constituents as much as he can. In the spring he expects to start setting up a series of meetings throughout his district, including Tahoe.

“As far as I’m concerned, I’m going to be just as active and accessible to everyone,” Gaines said in reference to any apprehension after last weekend’s deadly shooting in Arizona. “The state of California is reviewing their policies. They are briefing us legislators as far as proper procedures for having public forums. I will heed that advice, but it won’t prevent me from making sure I communicate with my constituents.”

Tahoe concerns

Gaines has a second home on the North Shore, so he is in a more unique situation than some elected officials to know firsthand what life in Tahoe is like – even if it’s part time knowledge.

He plans to keep an eye on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency to ensure “they are operating in a transparent fashion so special interests are not influencing their decision-making.”

Having TRPA Governing Board meetings accessible on the web with audio and visual components is something Gaines is pushing for.

“I think what is becoming more and more clear is that economic development is good for Lake Tahoe. When you put new infrastructure in at the lake it improves the health of the lake if done right,” Gaines said. “We would want individuals serving on the TRPA to help the local economy while at the same time preserving the lake.”

Gaines is going to seek revisions to the state building codes that took effect Jan. 1 which call for sprinklers in all new residential construction. Until this month the need for sprinklers was triggered based on square footage.

Research is being done to determine if he’ll seek to repeal the legislation, create different standards for construction at sea level v. elevations like Tahoe, or delay implementation.

In 2009 a woman in Truckee died when the sprinklers in her home were triggered by smoke from cooking. The glycerin in the sprinklers mixed with the flames from the stove and caused the fatal explosion.

Statewide issues

Even though a Democrat is in the governor's office, the Republican state Senator is optimistic change is coming.

"I've had three meetings with him in the last 30 days," Gaines said of Gov. Jerry Brown. "I credit him for being engaged and wanting to help solve California's problems."

However, he disagrees with the governor's idea to extend tax increases that went into affect two years ago. Voters may decide this in June.

"It's an extension of taxes that didn't exist two years ago," Gaines said, explaining why he calls the governor's proposal a tax hike.

Gaines in his years in the Assembly voted against all the budgets "because none was balanced."

Gaines understands people don't trust government. He is sure citizens don't understand what they are getting in a budget that was $58 billion in 1997 and nearly doubled a decade later.

He looks at items in the budget that didn't exist eight or 10 years ago and questions why. The senator points to in-home support services as a line item that keeps growing.

"I'm not sure what the state obligation is to care for families. That is a family obligation," Gaines said.

He wants to pursue public-private partnerships wherever possible.

“We need to eliminate programs that are not essential,” Gaines said. “The programs that are essential need to run in a more efficient manner.”

He wants to create a better business climate, to do away with agencies that bicker with one another.

Gaines points to British Columbia, Canada, which eliminated 160,000 regulations over two years and has not suffered a recession. He thinks California could learn a thing or two from its neighbors to the north to make for a better climate for businesses.

Looking at investment tax credits for businesses wanting to invest in the state would also help create a better climate, he said. This in turn would help to spur job growth. (The state unemployment rate for November was 12.4 percent, while it topped 17 percent in South Lake Tahoe.)

When it comes to higher education Gaines is fed up students are not able to graduate in four years because the classes are not offered. He wants to revamp the number of electives needed to graduate to help students move through the system.

Gaines wants to create more water storage for California, citing how the population has more than doubled since the reservoir system was established. He wants to find a solution for the problems with the Delta. One thing he adamantly opposes is the $11 billion water bond that is supposed to be on a ballot in 2012.

Committee assignments for lawmakers will likely come out next week, so what specialty areas Gaines will be working on remains to be seen.

Filling Assembly seat

Candidates will compete in a March 8 primary to fill Gaines’ former Assembly seat. If no one gets more than 50 percent, the

top two vote-getters – regardless of party – will be in a May 3 runoff.

People have until Jan. 24 to declare their candidacy.

Running so far on the Republican side are Gaines' wife, Beth; Michael Babich of Auburn; and Mike O'Connor of Lincoln.

Dennis Campanale of Placer County is the lone Democrat in the race.

South Lake officer has unique run-in with suspect

A South Lake Tahoe police officer found out literally how crappy the job can be.

The 27-year veteran, whose name is not being used to spare him any more ridicule, was called to a Stateline area motel Saturday just before 11pm to check on an intoxicated man.

The 58-year-old suspect said he needed to relieve himself. Officers said he could do so in jail.

"As he was walking to the police car, he let go of the pants he was holding up. As his pants fell to his ankles, he bent over slightly, and began to spew excrement from his anus in the direction of the officers, hitting one officer on the leg," Police Chief Brian Uhler said in a press release.

Uhler said that while it is tempting to laugh about this situation, it is serious because human excrement has germs, is considered a biohazard, and could cause illness. It is also an assault against a police officer.

Nancy Blachly – 1952-2011

South Lake Tahoe's first licensed massage therapist, Nancy Blachly, died Jan. 12 from injuries she had sustained two days earlier while skiing at Heavenly Mountain Resort.

Ms. Blachly was born June 8, 1952. She was 58.

Ms. Blachly spent most weekdays skiing. She would start the day taking the Gunbarrel lift up, doing three runs on the face and then making it to Mott Canyon for the 10am opening.



Nancy Blachly

Ski patrol was called at 10:30am Jan. 10. Her equipment was about 150 feet up the hill. Although a highly skilled skier, Ms. Blachly was not wearing a helmet, according to resort officials.

She was airlifted to Barton Memorial Hospital. Ms. Blachly was kept alive so her organs could be harvested. Health care was a big part of her life.

"She was always studying cutting-edge therapies," Gay Romeis, a longtime friend said. "She was into different healing modalities."

Ms. Blachly graduated magna cum laude from the University of Wisconsin with a pre-med focus in human anatomy, physiology

and kinesiology. She taught high school for several years. She also taught at Lake Tahoe Community College.

In the 1980s, Ms. Blachly was issued the first massage license by South Lake Tahoe. At that time she operated a business at the Y in the Raley's Center called Wave Makers.

An Association of Massage Therapists is the company she was running at the time of her death. Ms. Blachly was highly respected in the massage community – as a leader and advocate for therapists.

Besides skiing, Ms. Blachly was an avid recreationist. Some mornings she would go for a run before hitting the slopes. In the summer she would inline skate from her house to Fallen Leaf Lake where she would then take a swim.

"If she had any challenges, she saw them as opportunities," Romeis said. "Her love of skiing was unreal. She would ski down Mott and make it look like Ridge run."

Services will be Jan. 16 at 2pm at Embassy Suites, where she had done massage for years.

Ms. Blachly is preceded in death by son Patrick Egan.

She is survived by her mother, Aleta; brothers David and Dennis; and sister Boni, all who live outside of Lake Tahoe.

2010 ties 2005 as hottest years on record

By Justin Gillis, New York Times

New government figures for the global climate show that 2010 was the wettest year in the historical record, and it tied 2005 as the hottest year since record-keeping began in 1880.

The new figures confirm that 2010 will go down as one of the more remarkable years in the annals of climatology. It featured prodigious snowstorms that broke seasonal records in the United States and Europe; a record-shattering summer heat wave that scorched Russia; strong floods that drove people from their homes in places like Pakistan, Australia, California and Tennessee; a severe die-off of coral reefs; and a continuation in the global trend of a warming climate.

Two agencies, NASA and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, reported Wednesday that the global average surface temperature for 2010 had tied the record set in 2005. The analyses differ slightly; in the NOAA version, the 2010 temperature was 1.12 degrees Fahrenheit above the average for the 20th century, which is 57 degrees.

It was the 34th year running that global temperatures have been above the 20th-century average; the last below-average year was 1976. The new figures show that 9 of the 10 warmest years on record have occurred since the beginning of 2001.

The earth has been warming in fits and starts for decades, and a large majority of climatologists say that is because humans are releasing heat-trapping gases like carbon dioxide into the atmosphere. The carbon dioxide level has increased about 40 percent since the Industrial Revolution.

“The climate is continuing to show the influence of greenhouse gases,” said David R. Easterling, a scientist at NOAA’s National Climatic Data Center in Asheville, N.C.

Read the whole story

Ruth Baumann – 1936-2011

Ruth Baumann, matriarch of the Swiss family, died Jan. 12. She was 74.

Mrs. Baumann met her husband, Kurt Baumann, when she applied to be a waitress at the restaurant he owned in the middle of South Lake Tahoe. That was 1959, just after she moved to the area from Switzerland. They had been married for 44 years. He died Jan. 10, 2004.



Kurt Baumann with his brother in 1957 started what is still a family restaurant when they bought Schmidt's Bakery.

Mrs. Baumann was the face of the Swiss Chalet restaurant for years. Eventually the couple bought the entire center on Highway 50. The Swiss Chalet is the oldest restaurant in South Lake Tahoe.

They raised their sons, Peter, Ralph and Mark in South Lake Tahoe. The three trade off on who runs the restaurant. A recording at the restaurant on Jan. 13 said the eatery was closed for the day out of respect for Mrs. Baumann, but would resume normal business on Jan. 14.

Mrs. Baumann was a member of Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe, particularly in the International Goodwill and Understanding committee. The group supported an orphan from Austria who Mrs. Baumann then brought to the United States to meet his benefactors for a short stay.

Services are pending.