V-Day meeting

2011 will be the eighth year South Lake Tahoe will have a V-Day celebration.

This year our community has once again been granted the privilege of producing an Eve Ensler production. It's especially exciting because after a two-year break, local organizers are bringing back "The Vagina Monologues", after a successful two years of "A Memory, A Monologue, A Rant and Prayer". This community event raises money for local organizations: The South Lake Tahoe Women's Center, Tahoe Youth & Family Services, and Court Appointed Special Advocates.

The fundraising is important, but even more so is the awareness and message that V-Day brings.

A casting call and volunteer meeting for all men and women interested in participating will be Jan. 7 at 6pm. For those who are interested, call or email nategoddess@yahoo.com or (775) 843.7142 for more information about the meeting location and details. V-Day is a worldwide organization spreading awareness, raising money for local organizations, and fighting violence against women and girls.

V-Day's three core beliefs are:

Art has the power to reach, transform, and inspire to act.

Empowered women are unstoppable leaders and lasting social and cultural change is spread through their experience.

You cannot end violence against women without looking at the intersection of poverty, racism, the environment and war.

V-Day dreams of a world in which women and girls will be free to thrive, rather then merely survive.

Ski report: Don’t expect to be the only one there



Lots of blue sky, lots of snow, lots of people – that’s the forecast for what you will find on the slopes today.

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

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Beginning Jan. 1 Nevada constitutional officers and legislators will get a 6 percent pay increase.

• Learn about the trail improvements to the Carson-Iceberg Wilderness area.

• The Obama administration plans to reverse a Bush-era policy called “No More Wilderness” that will make millions of undeveloped acres of land eligible for federal wilderness protection.

• Click here to win a trip to the final stage of the Tour de California in May. The race begins in South Lake Tahoe on May 15.

• Fly into Reno-Tahoe International and ski for free that day at Squaw by showing your bordering pass.

Opinion: Lame duck Congress defied naysayers

Publisher's note: ***This editorial is from the Dec. 26, 2010, Sacramento Bee.***

As it turned out, the recently concluded lame-duck session of Congress wasn't as lame as many had predicted.

In fact, it turned out to be one of the most productive in years, even decades.

Picking up on one of the messages sent by voters in November, legislators (with some exceptions) put aside the rancor, gamesmanship and obstruction that characterized the last two years. Both parties seemed to recognize their fortunes could be enhanced by finding common ground.

Some pundits had forecast the lame-duck session – so named because it included lawmakers voted out of office – would be a waste of time and an exercise in bloviation. Yet Americans have a right to expect lawmakers to work right up until the end of their terms. That is the contract they signed with voters.

President Barack Obama's deal with Republicans extending tax cuts and unemployment benefits, in retrospect, proved to be a

blast that released the logjam. And Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid's masterful work kept the bills moving.

Where Republicans had been delaying and blocking everything, bills now made it to the floor – and garnered significant bipartisan support.

Read the whole story

Pensions push taxes higher across the country

By Jeannette Neumann, Wall Street Journal

Cities across the nation are raising property taxes, largely citing rising pension and health-care costs for their employees and retirees.

In Pennsylvania, the township of Upper Moreland is bumping up property taxes for residents by 13.6% in 2011. Next door the city of Philadelphia this year increased the tax 9.9%. In New York, Saratoga Springs will collect 4.4% more in property taxes in 2011; Troy will increase taxes by 1.9%.

Property-tax increases aren't unusual, in part because the taxes are among the main sources of local revenue. But officials say more and larger increases are taking hold. "This year we have seen a dramatic increase in our cities and towns having to increase property taxes" for pensions and other expenses, said Jack Garner, executive director of the Pennsylvania League of Cities and Municipalities.

Local officials and government workers say a confluence of factors is driving the increases, including the need to make

up for staggering investment losses from the financial crisis and rising costs as more workers retire. In addition, benefit increases promised in flush times are coming due as revenue flounders, and some cities have skipped payments to their pension funds over the years.

Read the whole story

Fundraiser for injured backcountry skier

On Jan. 6, the Slowrollers Bike Club is hosting the annual “After Christmas Christmas Party” to benefit local friend and skier Darren Johnson. Johnson was caught in an avalanche backcountry skiing near Kirkwood on Nov. 28.

The path took him over a rock cliff, and while amazingly he didn’t have any injuries from the neck down, he sustained massive head trauma. After being airlifted to Reno, surgery added a metal plate to his head, another under his left eye, which he’d almost lost. After 10 days in ICU, Johnson remained hospitalized for another 20 days and is now in a rehab unit in Las Vegas for two to three months.



Darren Johnson

Despite all that trauma, he has no brain loss, but the left side of his face has extensive nerve damage.

DJ, as he's known to friends, is an experienced backcountry skier and has skied all along the Sierra with childhood pal, Glen Plake, among others. Growing up in South Lake Tahoe with Plake, the two were featured in several Greg Stump ski films in the 1980s.

The benefit is at Mo's Place from 6-9pm, 3600 Lake Tahoe Blvd. in South Lake Tahoe.

There will be a place to make donations at the door, along with raffle and auction items.

For those who can't make the event, an account has been set up for Darren at Bank of the West, under the name of Andy Kaufer.

Love affair started in Tahoe reignited through the years

By Carlos Alcalá, Sacramento Bee

Pat Brown's heart is getting a second chance.

Twice.

Brown, 76, suffered a cardiac arrest while having dinner at the Elephant Bar in Citrus Heights on Dec. 2.

"I was gone," he said. "When your lights get turned off, your lights get turned off."

A quick application of CPR turned them back on – the first of his second chances.

He returned to the Elephant Bar on Monday, ostensibly for the crême brulée he didn't get to eat the last time.

Really, it was so the woman who revived him could say this:

"With all my heart, I love you," she said. "I would like to ask, would you marry me?"

That was his second second chance. The woman is his ex-wife Lucy Brown, a nurse he married 40 years ago and later divorced.

"In all honesty," Pat Brown answered, sitting in a booth in the back of the restaurant, "in my heart I never divorced you. You divorced me, remember?"

There's bittersweetness to this love story, because of one missing piece – a different second chance that will never come.

Their son Ryan, born in 1971, had an auto accident when he was 18 and was incapacitated – doctors said brain dead – for 17 years until he died in 2007.

The Browns' story goes back to a spring day in 1970 at Lake Tahoe, where Pat Brown worked as a general contractor.

Lucy Brown, now 68, was a cocktail waitress while waiting for her first nursing job to start at Barton Memorial Hospital in South Lake Tahoe.

Read the whole story

Truckee River Watershed Council secures funds for matching grant

New members of the Truckee River Watershed Council's Together for the Truckee Society have pledged a total of $30,000 a year for the next five years. This achieves the full amount of the matching grant given by the Martis Fund.

The Martis Fund announced in May a matching grant worth $30,000 a year for five years. In the past seven months 22 individuals, families and businesses joined the society, providing valuable unrestricted funding for the Truckee River Watershed Council. Combined with the matching grant from the Martis Fund, this will result in a total of $300,000.

"I continue to be amazed and impressed with the effectiveness of the Truckee River Watershed Council," Joanne Roubique, district ranger at the Truckee Ranger District said in a statement. "That so much excellent restoration has been done and that the group continues to attract funding from agencies, businesses and individuals as well as continuing to host one of the most effective volunteer programs around is a success story unlike any other."

The Truckee River Watershed Council's goal is to complete 40 priority restoration projects within the next 10 years, as well as continue monitoring and prevention projects.

If you are interested in learning more about the Together for the Truckee Society or the matching grant from the Martis Fund, contact Michele at (530) 550.8760.

The Martis Fund supports programs to secure open space, promote habitat restoration, and create workforce housing in the Martis Valley region. It was established in 2006 as a

collaborative project of DMB/Highlands Group, Mountain Area Preservation Foundation, and Sierra Watch. For more, visit http://www.martisfund.org/.

Pensions prove it pays to be a retired government employee

By Kathryn Reed

There comes a time when it doesn't pay to work. That time is when government workers are tapped out in the Public Employment Retirement System and it makes more sense to start withdrawing from that account.



Former El Dorado County Sheriff Jeff Neves a year ago said he was leaving office a year early to spend time with his family. He might be. He certainly has the cash to do so.

Neves, 56, is collecting $15,202 a month. He is not the only person in the county making more than $100,000 year off the taxpayer funded retirement system. Though he is the highest "paid" ex-county employee at $182,424.84 a year.

Here is what other former El Dorado County employees are collecting annually in retirement:

• Robert Altmeyer, $139,006.20

• Robert Brown, $118,633.68

• Steven Davis, $132,624.12

• Marty Hackett, $117,003.48

• Michael Hanford, $120,500.76

• Keith Harvey, $106,491.36

• David Koupal, $101,294.52

• John Litwinovich, $134,142.72

• Doug Nowka, $102,240.72

• William Whealton, $134,209.56.

Gayle Erbe-Hamlin, who retired earlier this month as the county's chief administrative officer, doesn't register on the list – but she will.

CalPERS recipients receive 60 percent of their highest annual salary.

Even though Erbe-Hamlin's base pay was $185,661 per year, she actually got paid $307,141.23 in 2010, according to county Auditor-Controller Joe Harn. The larger dollar amount includes longevity pay, management or administrative leave pay, buyout of sick pay and vacation time.

A letter from Harn this month to the Board of Supervisors warns the county's unfunded pension liability is $264 million and growing. It doubled from June 2008 to June 2009.

That figure is part of the estimated $1 trillion in unfunded retirement and health care packages nationwide. It's one of the reasons state, county and city budgets keep running a deficit.

South Lake Tahoe has initiated a two-tier pension system so new hires will get less when they retire. The county has not enacted such a policy.

But the city also has former employees who are collecting more

than $100,000 a year through their pensions.

Former South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Terry Daniels, 52, is the top money collector at $123,630.84 a year, or $10,302.57 a month. He retired a year ago.

Current Police Chief Brian Uhler makes $145,000 a year – to work.

Two former South Lake Tahoe fire chiefs are also in the $100,000 club:

• Mike Chandler, $101,670.48

• Jim Plake, $101,145.24.

Placer County has 21 ex-employees with pensions of more than $100,000 a year. Truckee has three people in that category.

All of this data is accessible to the public via this website.

Statewide, there are 9,111 retired government workers with pensions of more than $100,000 a year.

California has 59 city or county public employee retirement systems. Collectively there are 2,330,929 members – of that figure, 1,779,811 are active. There are 1,032,360 people receiving periodic payments.

Nevada has two PERS accounts with 117,794 members. Of those, 106,168 are active and 38,197 receive payments.

Below are two charts from the U.S. Census Bureau regarding PERS.

The 2008 survey covered fiscal years that ended between July 1, 2007, and June 30, 2008, and does not reflect revenue data for the entire calendar year of 2008.

State and level of government	Total receipts		Government contributions			Earnings on investments	
		Employee contributions	Total	From state government	From local government		
United States	79,649,581	36,929,944	81,996,539	36,261,593	45,734,946	(39,276,902)	
State	56,419,735	31,639,290	63,869,874	35,755,522	28,114,352	(39,089,429)	
Local	23,229,846	5,290,654	18,126,665	506,071	17,620,594	(187,473)	
California	(3,740,451)	7,784,280	15,767,098	4,705,733	11,061,365	(27,291,829)	
State	(6,204,256)	6,039,098	11,371,374	4,691,795	6,679,579	(23,614,728)	
Local	2,463,805	1,745,182	4,395,724	13,938	4,381,786	(3,677,101)	
Nevada	739,892	131,333	1,167,578	174,655	992,923	(559,019)	
State	739,892	131,333	1,167,578	174,655	992,923	(559,019)	

Expenditures of state and local public employee retirement systems for fiscal year 2008 in thousands of dollars.

State and level of government	Total payments	Benefits	Withdrawals	Other payments
United States	193,808,914	175,423,416	4,634,335	13,751,163
State	157,410,232	143,453,487	3,211,317	10,745,428
Local	36,398,682	31,969,929	1,423,018	3,005,735
California	30,195,419	28,019,958	606,055	1,569,406
State	21,397,173	20,194,042	482,035	721,096
Local	8,798,246	7,825,916	124,020	848,310
Nevada	1,243,467	1,033,622	16,830	193,015
State	1,243,467	1,033,622	16,830	193,015
Local	–	–	–	–

Caregiving support group

Caregiving is a difficult and often challenging role that one can undertake, and taking the opportunity to share information and feel connected to others who are providing care is a vital step to perform this task to the best of your ability.

Take the opportunity on Jan. 13 from 5:30 to 7:30pm at the South Lake Tahoe Senior Center, 3050 Highway 50, South Lake Tahoe to become connected and rejuvenated at your local support group.

Refreshments will be served.

Free respite care is available to qualified caregivers. Pre-authorization is required for respite services. Questions? Contact the Family Caregiver Support Program at (530) 621.6151.