Flights increase at LT Airport, hangar space goes unused

With 13 hangars at Lake Tahoe Airport vacant, this means $65,000 in revenues not being generated. Airport Director Sherry Miller is trying to find ways to fill those spots, likely with incentives. Details have not been worked out.



A report to the City Council this month from the Airport Commission shows traffic count year to date is up nearly 20 percent, while reports of noise level being higher than allowed is down 14 percent compared to 2009.

While CalStar and HeliTahoe say their numbers are slightly down from a year ago, the Lake Tahoe Flight School that opened in January 2009 is seeing its business increase.

To help with airport work an unpaid intern has been brought in to work on the updating the Airport Emergency Plan, Airport Certification Manual and clean up the archives.

– Kathryn Reed

Day without a Bag event spreads in SoCal

Publisher's note: ***The South Lake Tahoe Sustainability Commission is contemplating a Day without a Bag event.***

By Barbara Henry, North County Times

A city-sponsored Environmental Commission that has explored the idea of banning plastic bags in Encinitas hasn't achieved that goal yet, but reports growing success with its once-a-year, bag-free day.

"It gets bigger every year," commission Chairwoman Elizabeth Taylor told the City Council on Wednesday night.

In fact, the "Day Without a Bag" event, which occurs during the holiday shopping season, has proved so popular that it's about to go countywide, she added.

The commission held its first plastic bag-free day in December 2008. During that event, about nine participating merchants handed out free, reusable bags and encouraged shoppers to keep using them in future store visits.

A year later, a dozen participating merchants handed out a total of 4,000 reusable bags.

This year's event is set for Dec. 16, and the commission expects to have 100 participating businesses from across the county, Taylor said.

Environmental organizations, including the Surfrider Foundation, have long sought a ban on plastic bags. They stress that such bags are hazardous to wildlife and a huge trash headache for communities.

However, the bag-ban movement faced some setbacks this year, Taylor and others said. A state proposal to ban single-use plastic bags made it partway through the legislative process but failed to win approval in the state Senate.

Read the whole story

TTD trying to get handle on BlueGo bus system

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – One day the short-range transit plan for the South Shore will be adopted and implemented.

Gordon Shaw of LSC Transportation Consultants gave yet another presentation on the plan that has been talked about for months. This time the Tahoe Transportation District board heard it. The board is expected to take action on it at the December meeting even though some of what is in the plan is already being implemented.



BlueGo buses operate under a fiscal cloud of uncertainty. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"We have stopped the bleeding," Shaw told the TTD board this month. "We have more money coming in than going out – not much."

He spoke about what to do in 2011 —- which is in the plan STATA adopted and is being used now.

Shaw also gave two scenarios for what transit on the South Shore might look like in 2015. One was essentially the status quo if there is no economic recovery and the other considers financial improvements in the region.

The latter plan has a goal of bus service on Highway 50 every 10 minutes.

“This is what you see when you go to Park City,” Shaw said. “Then the ridership increases.”

He’d like to see trolley service on the East and West shores.

Shaw pointed out some stops don’t have benches and several don’t have shelters. He also suggested the participation agreements with the private entities be reviewed and made consistent. He’d like information provided in Spanish. He wants the fares to stay as they are, but do away with tokens and make the payment system simpler.

Carl Hasty, TTD executive director, added that opportunities his group has that bankrupt South Tahoe Area Transportation Authority didn’t have is by the time 2015 roles around waterborne transit could be integrated into the land transit as a connector.

He also said Caltrans has a signal plan for Highway 50, but about $3.5 million is needed. “That’s something the district could help with,” Hasty said.

According Hasty, the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency hired Shaw to come up with the plan that was presented. But during presentations to the now defunct STATA board that distinction was not made clear. It appeared STATA had hired Shaw to do the transportation plan.

TRPA would be involved because it is the parent of the Tahoe

Metropolitan Planning Organization. The TMPO, as it is called, is the transportation division of TRPA, according to its website.

It is through the TMPO that federal and state transportation dollars come. TRPA in turn hands it out to the appropriate entity.

One reason a private company could not run the entire bus operation is the feds and states want to give dollars to another government agency – which the TRPA is.

TTD can also be a conduit for money. This agency has been around since the 1980s, though not always active.

In other transportation news:

• TRC Consultants, the firm hired by STATA to run the buses after MV Transportation was fired by the now-bankrupt STATA board, is using the name BlueGo Transit Management Inc. for its South Shore operation. The company is based in Florida.

The agreement for the company to operate BlueGo was ratified at the TTD meeting earlier this month. This was a formality now that the bankruptcy judge terminated the agreement TRC had with STATA. The TRC agreement is good through June 30, 2011.

Although the firm will be paid $23,460 per month, the source of TTD's income to make this happen has not been solidified.

South Lake Tahoe and Ridge Resorts have signed agreements.

Douglas County commissioners will discuss the matter at their Dec. 2 meeting.

Heavenly Mountain Resort and Lakeside Casino are close to signing, according to Hasty.

Negotiations are under way with Harveys, Harrah's and El Dorado County. The MontBleu contract is under review.

• All individual members of the former STATA board have been served papers in the lawsuit naming them as defendants in papers MV has filed. Nick Haven, a non-voting member representing TRPA, was not sued. His employer, though, was.

MV is going after the several million dollars it believes is owed to it from STATA. With STATA having few, if any, assets other than the more than $600,000 in a court ordered frozen bank account, MV believed its only recourse was to sue the individuals.

Brotherhood teams with Christmas Cheer to help needy

The Brotherhood Motorcycle Club is working with Christmas Cheer to help local families in need this holiday season.

The club will be giving out the fixings for 50 Thanksgiving dinners at 10am Wednesday at the American Legion Hall, 2748 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe. Families will receive a grocery bag with one 16-18 pound turkey, stuffing, 5 pounds of potatoes and a pumpkin pie.



The Brotherhood is helping

families in need.
Photo/Provided

Families must be registered with Christmas Cheer to participate.

Call (530) 308.5265 for information.

Ski report: Lifts are open, snow is falling, roads are iffy

By Kathryn Reed

Heading into Thanksgiving weekend, skiers and resort operators definitely have something to be thankful for. There is plenty of snow to gobble up.



Heavenly, Squaw and Northstar opened this weekend. Boreal is open, too. Kirkwood is looking for a Wednesday start day, which is also a possibility for Sierra-at-Tahoe. Other resorts are planning to open Turkey Day weekend.

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

In South Lake Tahoe another foot fell overnight. Meyers tends to have twice as much as what "town" gets. The North Shore, in particular Truckee, always chimes in with more white stuff than South Lake Tahoe. Reno, Carson City and Carson Valley all

have gotten hit with several inches of snow from these storms.

Wind could be an issue today throughout the basin, on the slopes, and driving the mountain passes. It was whiteout conditions at times in some spots Saturday; expect the same today.

Chain controls are in effect. Highway 89 around Emerald Bay is closed. Check the state icons on the Home page of *Lake Tahoe News* for road conditions.

Whenever driving in the mountains, but especially in the winter, carry a blanket, shovel, water, food, warm clothing, flashlight and appropriate shoes.

The National Weather Service's winter storm warning is in effect until 4 today. Today could bring 5-10 inches above 7,000 feet and 3-6 inches below 7,000 feet.

Another round of storms will blow in Monday night.

"This low pressure system is much colder and could potentially bring significant accumulations to northeast California an northwest Nevada," the Weather Service in Reno warns.

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Holiday faire creates festive mood

By Kathryn Reed

CAMP RICHARDSON – A crackling fire in the oversized fireplace, holiday songs being song by youngsters, the smell of mulled

wine – oh, and all those handmade crafts and jewelry.

It had to be the annual Valhalla Holiday Faire at the Grand Hall. This South Shore tradition continues today from 10am-5pm. The Tahoe Intermediate Honor Choir will sing at 2pm.



The Valhalla Holiday Faire continues Nov. 22. Photos/Kathryn Reed

On Saturday it was students from Sierra House and Tahoe Valley Elementary schools singing carols in the morning, and in the afternoon were voices from the Environmental Magnet School, Bijou and St. Theresa.

Jan Carpenter was busy bundling up bars of soap she and husband Dave created. Honey citrus and lavender were the top sellers for the Tahoe Mountain Soap Company on Nov. 20.

Author Todd Borg didn't know how busy the event would be so he brought his laptop to be able to work on book No. 9.

"I couldn't be happier than making up stories for a living," Borg said.

The Tahoe Tallac Association, which puts on the event, decided to make this a two-day event this year instead of three because the Friday night gathering is not always well attended.

Executive Director Lori Cramer said a steady stream of people filtered in and out of the old building to buy holiday items. It’s free to browse or listen to the choir.

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In The Mood benefits Tahoe Forest Cancer Center

Action snowsport photography and video from around the world highlight the 15th annual In The Mood, a free benefit event for the Tahoe Forest Cancer Center on Dec. 1 at 6pm at Resort at Squaw Creek.

The evening’s program will showcase the talents of the biggest names in adventure photography, video, and filmmaking including acclaimed filmmakers Scott Gaffney, Tom Day, Mike and Dave Hatchett, and Brad Holmes. Nationally recognized photographers include Keoki Flagg, Dave Norehad, Court Leve and Hank deVre.

A highlight of this year’s event is a tribute to the event’s co-founder, Robert “Fro” Frohlich, who passed away in October after a long fight with cancer.

A huge raffle with hundreds of prizes is a focal point of the night’s festivities. Grand prizes include a Squaw Valley adult season pass, heli-ski trips, gear and more. Other prizes include local resort day tickets, snowcat and heli-skiing adventures, ski and snowboard equipment, lodging packages, gift certificates and hard and soft outdoor retail items.

Raffle tickets may be purchased at the door before and

throughout the event. All proceeds benefit the Tahoe Forest Cancer Center and the Truckee Community Christmas program.

Led by Medical Director Laurence Heifetz, the Tahoe Forest Cancer Center, located in Truckee, is committed to providing the highest quality cancer treatment and care to patients. The center strives to offer the most appropriate and current cancer diagnostic and therapeutic modalities in an honest, supportive, respectful and compassionate manner. The center is associated with the UC Davis Health System and the Tahoe Forest Hospital Foundation charitable organization.

As it was for the first In The Mood 15 year's ago, guests are encouraged to donate a can of food at the door to support Truckee Community Christmas Inc., a nonprofit association that feeds the less fortunate over the holidays.

All ages are welcome. There is no admission charge. The doors open at 6pm and the show begins shortly thereafter. A no-host bar will be available.

The evening is co-emceed by local TV personalities Todd Offenbacher and Eric T. Brandt. The Resort at Squaw Creek will host a post-event party beginning at 9pm in Sandy's Pub.

In The Mood is a Snowtribe Production. The event is supported by numerous partners and contributors including the Resort at Squaw Creek, Squaw Valley USA, Points North Heli Adventures Inc., Pacific Crest Heli Guides, Tahoe Dave's Skis and Boards, Snowbomb.com, Tahoe TV, and Swank Audio/Visual.

In the spirit of a free community event, In The Mood is supported and produced entirely by volunteers and the generosity of local and regional businesses and merchants. Raffle prize donations are welcomed.

For more information about the event, contact Eric Brandt at (530) 583.4206 or eric@tahoetv.com. For raffle donations, contact Meg deVre at (530) 525.6281.

Schwarzenegger launches climate change group

By Margot Roosevelt, Los Angeles Times

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Tuesday launched an international organization to tackle climate change with leaders from regional governments in Europe, South America, Africa, Asia and the United States.

The failure to achieve an international climate pact in Copenhagen last year left many people discouraged, Schwarzenegger said, addressing several hundred delegates to a "climate summit" at UC Davis. But now, he added, "The sub-nationals should do their work…. The green revolution is moving forward full speed ahead without the international agreement."

Despite Schwarzenegger's cheerleading, the signing ceremony for the Regions of Climate Action group, known as the R-20, had a lame-duck quality. Only one other U.S. governor, outgoing Democrat Jim Doyle of Wisconsin, was present for the signing in the half-empty auditorium; no provincial leader from China, Earth's largest carbon-emitter, agreed to join the effort.

Schwarzenegger officials had predicted that about 100 government leaders would sign the pact to cooperate on climate change; but in the 11 months since the governor first announced the initiative, only about 25 states and provinces have agreed to be part of the group. Besides Doyle, the group includes the governors of Michigan, Oregon and Washington.

Read the whole story

Opinion: Ensign’s days are likely numbered

By Jon Ralston, Las Vegas Sun

Suffering from the enervating ennui of postelection depression, I always find there is only one cure: Look ahead to the next one.

No, I don’t mean the yawnfest to succeed Las Vegas Mayor Oscar Goodman – assuming he doesn’t barricade himself in his office (lifetime supply of Bombay Sapphire therein) to stay longer. I refer to Campaign 2012, which officially began one week ago, with Republicans salivating to build on legislative gains here and everywhere, and Democrats trying to find a way to hold off the GOP without the vote magnet named Harry Reid on the ballot. And before the campaign matrix sorts itself out, we have to endure a bloodbath unlike any Sam Peckinpah could have imagined – and it always seems to move in slow motion! – known as Session ’11, which could reshape the conventional wisdom I am about to dispense.

Rarely does a cycle approach with the number of cascading triggers as does the one that just began, with the first one at the top. Nevada’s junior senator, John Ensign, may not know it, but he is a walking political corpse, soon to be indicted or willingly or forcibly retired.

His fate is inextricably linked to that of several other Nevada politicians, whose ambition or lack thereof could dramatically alter the levers of power in the state – or not.

I have to believe Ensign will soon become a target of the National Republican Senatorial Committee. Why? Because the GOP

sees a path to taking the Senate in 2012 – two-thirds of the contested seats are held by Democrats – and they don't want to have to worry about defending their own. Ensign has a disapproval rating approaching Harry Reid-like elevation and he will have neither the benefit of a Reid-like turnout machine or campaign team. Those who know him or have been with him before want nothing to do with him now. Even in Nevada, where the dead are resurrected and no depredation seems unforgivable, Ensign has no path to victory.

Read the whole story

Plenty of snow, people cover Heavenly's slope on Day 1

By Kathryn Reed

"The snow was truly epic."

That's how season passholder Michael Brown of Stateline described opening day at Heavenly Mountain Resort.



California Trail at Heavenly on opening day Nov. 20.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

He wasn’t at the gondola in time to get “first chair” – he had to settle for the second car. But he beat the snowboarders in front of him who had to lock in to their bindings to be the first one on California Trail this season.

Heavenly had to delay the start of the season a day because Mother Nature was whipping up winds that made it unsafe to fire up the lifts Friday. Not the case a day later – Nov. 20.

What started off as a sunny, blue-sky day Saturday at lake level gradually turned to partly cloudy and was back to winter conditions by early afternoon. It was much the same on the mountain.

Charlie Smith of South Lake Tahoe was taking advantage of having bought a Double Whammy pass to ski Sierra and Northstar and being able to turn it in for a Vail Resorts’ Epic Pass. This is all possible only this year because of Vail’s purchase of Northstar last month.

He took one run before needing to warm up in the Umbrella Bar at the confluence of the gondola debarkation, Tamarack lift and Adventure Peak Grill. He said the run was great. In the bar he did wince a bit at the $9.41 for a shot of Bushmills whiskey.

Others were happy to have a flask of peppermint schnapps in their pocket to add to hot cocoa. Still others parted with $8.85 for a Stella.

The gondola started running at 8:30am, with a line of eager skiers and boarders. People were already heading home before 10am. Passholders often just ski a couple hours, but with only run open and it starting to get busy, it was enough to chase some people off the mountain.

For those who paid the $62 to ski one run, well, it’s debatable if it was worth it. Though, there’s always something special about opening day at any resort.

Daily prices will keep going up. Go to Heavenly’s website, put in the date you plan to be there and the price comes up. Still, like all resorts, a season pass is the best deal as long as you don’t want to ski on the blackout dates.

California Trail, though covered without an obstacle to be seen, was littered with bodies. To the skiers’ left was a mini terrain park that was getting substantial traffic on its various features.

More trails will open as conditions permit – which Heavenly officials say will happen today. Dipper Express will be open, giving access to Orion and Bigger Dipper trails. This will greatly spread people beyond Tamarack chair. East Peak Lodge will also be open.

At the base of the Tamarack chairlift is the Tamarack Lodge that from the outside looks ready to serve the masses. Heavenly’s multi-million dollar lodge will open in February.

An unfortunate sight was a dad yelling at his daughter who was about 7 to turn her snowboard like his. This “Little League parent” behavior is always sad to see, but really, did he need to do this on Day 1 and in cold, snowy weather – especially when staff at the base of gondola urged beginners to come back another day.

Another piece of advice – put the bar up on the chairlift before the skis hit the snow at the end of the lift. And don’t hold the bar down again, buddy. It’s a good thing you skied off fast.

One guy visiting from Michigan decided on the offhand chance Heavenly opened he’d have his ski clothes with him. He was making the most of it under gray skies and windy weather. He

was ecstatic to be on the lift no matter the weather.

A foursome from Vegas ventured up to the Umbrella Bar to check things out. They, unlike another group of lookiloos, were dressed for the weather. The other group showed up in tennis shoes.

Staff was on top of their game on Day 1. The guys at both ends of the gondola, coming and going, were super cheerful and eager to put skis and boards on/off the cars. Missy at the Umbrella Bar was handling the crowd as people wanted to drink and beverages weren’t quite available because the bar and portable food station had to be dug out and stocked before service was available.

Heavenly’s website will keep listing what lifts and runs are open. With the winter storm warning in effect through 4pm today, powder day is likely what people will experience today.

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