Economics to be topic at annual Tahoe enviro summit

By Frank X. Mullen Jr., Reno Gazette-Journal

Invasive species, the threat of devastating wildfires and the economic future of Lake Tahoe will be topics at the forefront of the 14th annual Lake Tahoe Summit scheduled for Tuesday at Sand Harbor State Park.

“Environmental gains and economic gains are inextricably linked,” said Dennis Oliver, spokesman for the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency. “The conversation at the lake is that the region needs to reinvent itself as a destination in order to come out of our economic doldrums.”

Oliver said the area’s economic woes predate the national downturn. Over the past decade, increased gaming competition elsewhere has whittled away at the lake’s casino-based economy. On Monday, Tahoe business leaders are meeting in a “Prosperity Summit” to discuss ways to diversify the local economy, a theme that will carry over to the next day’s event at Sand Harbor, which is hosted by U.S. Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, D-Nev.

Previous Tahoe Summits focused exclusively on environmental concerns.

The forums began in 1997, when Democratic President Bill Clinton, Democratic Vice President Al Gore and Reid hosted the first summit, a conference aimed at ensuring that the natural beauty of Lake Tahoe would be preserved. At the time, Lake Tahoe was losing its clarity at the rate of about one foot per year.

Read the whole story

Cracking CalPERS became easy for Stateline man when policy shifted

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Alfred Villalobos, a sometimes pugnacious businessman with a troubled financial history, wasn't an obvious candidate to charm his way into the inner circle of America's largest public pension fund.

Though he had served three years on the CalPERS board in the 1990s, he wasn't a universally popular figure. When he reappeared at CalPERS' Sacramento headquarters two years after his departure, pitching investment deals, many within the organization were appalled at his heavy-handed lobbying. Amid the uproar, one of his earliest clients fired him, and his activities prompted hearings in the Legislature.



Alfred Villalobos

But the Stateline, Nev., businessman persisted. Over the course of a decade, he penetrated the very heart of the California Public Employees' Retirement System, allegedly co-opting the chief executive and other top officials. His reward

was more than $50 million in commissions earned on $4 billion worth of investments he pitched to the fund.

Villalobos’ work has become an influence-peddling scandal for CalPERS. State and federal officials are investigating, and CalPERS has commissioned its own examination of how one man could allegedly corrupt a $200 billion institution whose governing board includes the state treasurer and controller.

Read the whole story

Residents play role in fighting invasive weeds

By Wendy West

Invasive weeds raise seasonal fire danger and threaten lake water quality. Preventing the introduction of invasive weeds is the best way to protect the Lake Tahoe Basin from the damage and impacts of these invaders.

By identifying new infestations early and controlling them quickly, landowners can protect their properties and the lake, and avoid the expensive control costs associated with larger infestations.

Late summer and fall are the perfect time to identify and report terrestrial – on land – invasive weeds. The Lake Tahoe Basin Weed Coordinating Group has a new online tool to make it easier. The new website provides maps of known invasive weed sites and allows landowners, concerned citizens and land managers to report sightings of new infestations. Users will also find extensive weed identification tools and photos to

help recognize the area’s priority invasive plants. All reports are verified by a LTBWCG team member.

Group members then determine the best way to control the weeds before they become established.

Left unchecked, invasive weeds can damage forests, roads, trails, parks, neighborhoods and natural areas. Once established, weed infestations are difficult and expensive to control and can reduce land values, damage water quality and clarity, contribute to soil erosion, displace native plants and degrade wildlife habitat.

Area residents can help stop the spread of invasive weeds by making sure they are not moving seeds or plant parts that can start new weeds in uninfested areas. Hikers, bikers and fisherman should remove all plant parts and seeds from their boots, clothing and equipment before leaving an area to prevent weed spread.

Vehicle undercarriages and tires should be checked before moving from a weed-infested area and seeds and plant parts should be removed, bagged and placed in a garbage receptacle.

By taking a few simple steps to prevent introduction and report new invasive weed sites, concerned citizens, land managers and landowners can help protect the Lake Tahoe Basin. Prevention and early detection are always the most effective and least expensive options when managing invasive weeds.

Wendy West is chair of the UC Cooperative Extension in Placerville.

California ag land may turn into farms of green energy

By Todd Woody, New York Times

LEMOORE – Thousands of acres of farmland here in the San Joaquin Valley have been removed from agricultural production, largely because the once fertile land is contaminated by salt buildup from years of irrigation.

Green

But large swaths of those dry fields could have a valuable new use in their future – making electricity.

Farmers and officials at Westlands Water District, a public agency that supplies water to farms in the valley, have agreed to provide land for what would be one of the world's largest solar energy complexes, to be built on 30,000 acres.

At peak output, the proposed Westlands Solar Park would generate as much electricity as several big nuclear power plants.

Unlike some renewable energy projects blocked by objections that they would despoil the landscape, this one has the support of environmentalists.

Read the whole story

Failed Tahoe City condo

project returning to marshland

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Bulldozers aren’t typically welcome sights around Lake Tahoe, but just outside Tahoe City they’re being used by construction workers and engineers to restore the natural habitat – not disturb it.

The project calls for turning 35 North Shore acres prepared for a failed condominium development back into natural marshland.

At $2.6 million, the project is one of 700 identified in the Tahoe basin aimed at rectifying environmental wrongs.

Approximately 300 projects of varying complexity have been completed, officials said.

Read the whole story

Grant writing classes

Parasol Community Collaboration is offering three-part grant writing training class.

Sept. 22 – Developing Your Idea Into A Fundable Plan

Sept. 29 – Researching Funder Matches For Your Plan

Oct. 6 – Customizing Your Proposal To Funder Specs

Instructor: Phil Johncock has a 92 percent success rate. His

students received more than $1.2 billion in grants in the first 2.5 years applying the system you will have access to in this three-part training.

He designed Nevada's first and longest-running college online course in grant writing in 1997 and the 10-credit Grant Writing Certification program at Truckee Meadows Community College in 2001.

Location: DWR Center, 948 Incline Way, Incline Village, Event: Grant Writing Mega-Success, PCC Nonprofit Training Series

Time: 4-5:30pm

RSVP: pcc@parasol.org or (775) 298.0119

Book bloggers keep the art of reading alive

By Allen Pierleoni, Sacramento Bee

Book lovers are blogging about their favorite subject, appearing online at a near viral rate.



Their sites cover every genre, along with aggregated book news, best-seller lists, author interviews and related links.

Book bloggers – BBs – even held their own convention recently in New York City. And it looks like their credibility within the established publishing industry is growing. For instance,

BBs were given media credentials to attend this year's BookExpo America, the industry's showcase trade fair.

The day after BEA closed, the first Book Blogger Convention opened. BBs from around the nation hosted panel discussions in front of overflow audiences that included executives from some of publishing's biggest houses.

Read the whole story

LTCC's green choices reap enviro, economic dividends

By Kathryn Reed

Looking for Lake Tahoe Community College's fall schedule?



It's going to be a little harder to find a hard copy of the two-year institution's schedule as it follows the lead of other colleges by not mailing them out as well as reducing the content. Officials envision the print version going away completely in the future.

This fall and for the foreseeable future it is available via the college's website or by clicking schedule. Hard copies will be at the South Lake Tahoe college starting Aug. 16 – the only place they will be in hard copy. Open registration begins Sept. 3, with classes starting Sept. 20.

"Where we see the possibility of losing students is people taking the occasional class who are quite used to getting the schedule in their mailbox as their reminder of class

availability," Christina Proctor, LTCC spokeswoman, said.

Besides this being one of the college's green initiatives, it also is a cost-saving tool. Printing fewer schedules, along with not including a detailed description of the course will save $10,000 a year.

"We have to make sure our limited dollars are going where they need to, which is students. This is one easy way to save money and not really affect services to students," Proctor said.

The college is hoping people will recycle the schedules by having multiple people use a single copy. With it all being online and the college having computers for the public to use, everyone still has access to a schedule.

This is not the only way the college is going green. When Craig Brinkman came onboard as a contract employee through a federal grant, he noticed most printers on campus were ink jets.

The IT department has wiped out the active inventory of printers by 40 percent. This means a whole lot of people adjusting to not having a personal printer. Laser jets are what they are sharing.

The change also comes with a reduction of ink by 50 percent. Monetary savings comes with fewer cords plugged into a wall as well as less ink needed to be bought, and what is purchased will cost less.

All of this is environmentally beneficial, too.

Everyone is also going to a terminal server. It should reduce the demand on the information technology employees.

"There have been some bumps along the way. It's a change in the way we do business, a change in thinking," Proctor said.

Brinkman is also responsible for implementing Datatel, a

software system that is supposed to make the college run more efficiently. Brinkman wrote an article for *TechEDge* about this and IT issues at LTCC.

Another way the college would like to be green is by creating a geothermal facility. It has gone after a number of grants, but continues to be bypassed. The plan is to tap into the geothermal power of Lake Tahoe.

“I have also implemented an online campaign on the college Facebook page and this fall students will find the logo around campus with explanations about other green projects the college is implementing,” Proctor said.

Title IX leveled the playing field

Publisher’s note: *This editorial is from the Aug. 13, 2010, Reno Gazette-Journal.*

If you’ve wondered what the real impact of Title IX, the law that required schools to offer comparable athletic programs for men and women, has been, just thumb through the yearbook from a typical American high school of 50 years ago.

For someone accustomed to the vigorous sports programs available to so many young women in middle school, high school and college today, the dearth of girls in the athletics sections of those yearbooks is shocking.

With just a few exceptions, women weren’t expected to play sports, or even invited to play sports. (It should be noted that 50 years ago, many schools still steered boys into

“manual training” – carpentry and auto mechanics – and girls into cooking and sewing classes.)

The credit for turnaround is owed almost entirely to Title IX.

Read the whole story

Paddle event on Lake Tahoe

Join the Lake Tahoe Water Trail for thee Fall Paddle Day on Oct. 9 at 8:30am.

Paddle from Zephyr Cove Lodge with researchers at the forefront of protecting Lake Tahoe from aquatic invasive species. A barbecue will follow.

The cost is $30/person, $50/couple includes lunch (Members $25/person, $45/couple).

Kayak rental available on site.

Advance registration is required. Online registration begins Sept. 9 at www.laketahoewatertrail.org.