Lake Tahoe looking to bring prosperity to basin

By Ed Fletcher, Sacramento Bee

Recently some 2,000 yoga enthusiasts made like warriors, formed trees and played eagle amid the pine-scented air, cool breezes and breathtaking beauty offered by Lake Tahoe.

By nightfall, the visitors to Squaw Valley Resort, from as far away as Canada and the Eastern Seaboard, grooved to pulsing beats from nationally known musical artists.



Barton Hospital's bike fitting program run by Jason Collin is part of the prosperity plan via destination health care. Photo/Kathryn Reed

If the Tahoe Basin economy must shift – as a recently unveiled study suggests – from relying on gamblers to appealing to environmentally conscious tourists, events such as the Wanderlust Yoga & Music Festival are its future.

Read the whole story

Time for a City Council that represents the people

To the community,

The El Dorado County Grand Jury, in its Final 2010 Report states, “The (South Lake Tahoe) City Council, in its reports, procedures and by evidence received by the Grand Jury, points to a severely handicapped organization that needs major changes.”

If ever there was a time when substantive change could happen, this is it. I first moved to Tahoe in 1979. I have always believed in the importance of law and government, even more so in a community like South Lake Tahoe where so few votes elect the five city leaders who have such power over our lives. Over the years, I have become disheartened with the City Council’s blatant disregard of the needs and voices of the hardy, long-suffering locals they were elected to serve.

It seemed the council’s collective deafness had very few negative consequences for them until the latest Grand Jury Report, which has focused a blinding spotlight on how the same select few good-old-boys and girls have been able to continually replace the will of the electorate with their own personal agendas.

It seems the incumbents have all chosen to run for cover, rather than to stay and have a hand in fixing some serious procedural and philosophical problems. As the Grand Jury put it, “The City Council, when facing controversial issues or

after threat of litigation, routinely drops issues, even if addressing the issue would improve the function of government or service to the public. … voting often appears to be the result of Council members pursuing personal agendas rather than operating in the best interests of the City."

I for one am not going to shed even one tear over these former leaders' hasty departure. The mission statement on the city's website says, "The City Council exists to represent the public interest…." Maybe now there's a chance to elect a council that will do just that.

But it still requires the willingness of fearless locals to get off their backsides and step up to the plate. You've still got until Aug. 11 at 5pm to file -– whether you're a former unsuccessful candidate and longtime local, or someone just new to town. This is going to be a wide-open race in a way it hasn't been in decades. A small group of civic-minded individuals have run for City Council in the past, asking for voters' support to help create positive change. With the right mix of candidates, the unbreakable voting block of the monied special interests that sent them down to crashing defeat in the past can be overcome this year. Even if you can't run for office, you can vote in November.

Maybe the City Council has chosen to turn a deaf ear to the Grand Jury's scathing remarks, but Tahoe locals need to heed them well. The time for complaining is over. Now is the time for action.

Joann Eisenbrandt, South Lake Tahoe and Camino

Report: Carson City home market recovery looks good



By Venessa Wong, Bloomberg Businessweek

A housing market rebound seems tenuous following the expiration of the home buyer tax credit, and consumer confidence remains weak due to lackluster employment, but David Stiff, chief economist at Fiserv, says the bottom is near. Home prices in the U.S. have declined 29.5 percent over the past four years, according to the Fiserv Case-Shiller Indexes. Stiff says prices should form a trough early next year, when median prices will be down an estimated 32.9 percent from the 2006 peak.

By early 2014, they will have climbed about 7.2 percent from 2010 levels, according to the indexes. Fiserv and Moody's Economy.com base the housing forecast on factors that include income growth, demographic trends, unemployment rates, foreclosure rates, and construction costs. Of 384 places surveyed, the Bremerton-Silverdale area in Washington State had the highest four-year growth forecast, with prices expected to increase 44.7 percent from 2010 to 2014. Other leading growth markets: Bend, Ore., where prices are expected to jump 33.6 percent by 2014, and Detroit, with a 33.1 percent forecast. Markets with the weakest projections: Miami and Naples in Florida and Atlantic City, N.J., where prices are expected to continue to fall over the next four years.

[Skipping ahead to No. 5]

5. Nevada

Biggest home price increase projected in 2014: Carson City metro

Forecast 4-year price increase: 31.6 percent

Current median price: $141,524*

Prices to reach trough in: 2011 Q2

Median family income: $63,100

Population: 55,180

By the second quarter of 2011, prices in the Carson City area are expected to have fallen 34.4 percent from peak levels, according to the Fiserv and Moody's Economy.com. Recovery will depend on job creation, as the unemployment rate was 13.4 percent in June, according to the BLS. While expectations for near-term economic growth have diminished recently and competition for jobs is extremely high, opportunities exist, even in a declining labor market, according to Nevada's Employment, Training, & Rehabilitation Dept.

Index used to calculate historical home price changes: FHFA

* Source: John Burns Real Estate Consulting, April 2010

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe Restaurant Week

menus released

Nearly 30 restaurants are participating in the inaugural Lake Tahoe Restaurant Week, and most have posted their three-course prix-fixe menus here.



Menus are offered during the weeklong celebration, Sept. 5-12.

There are no passes, tickets or coupons needed to take part in Lake Tahoe Restaurant Week. Instead, guests simply visit the eatery, all of which are offering 3-course, prix-fixe menus for $20, $30 and $40 per person (tax and gratuity not included). Reservations are recommended.

Controversial West Slope animal shelter moves forward

By Kathryn Reed

It’s possible the multi-million dollar animal shelter that has been in the works for a number of years on the West Slope will break ground this fall.



The 17,700-square-foot facility would consolidate the multiple locations El Dorado County Animal Services Authority currently occupies. It would also mean no longer needing to pay $145,000 to lease space for large animals.

The shelter has been a bit controversial – with the latest attack coming from the grand jury. The 2010 report that came out this summer questions the Board of Supervisors' logic in 2006 to purchase the 10 acres between Shingle Springs and El Dorado when only 7.5 acres are useable; why the seller wasn't asked to help with improvements – like the $1.5 million needed to put in a road to the location, drainage and other basics that will ultimately help the neighbors at no cost to them; and how the purchase got approved when the seller was a friend of a supervisor.

Despite the grand jury's findings, the county in July went forward with asking staff to come up with bid documents. The board could be asked to approve the bid package in September. The infrastructure improvements would be the first phase, with the building likely being under construction next summer, with a move-in date of 2012.

"I think the county itself has done everything in its power to find the right location for the shelter," said Henry Brzezinski, who runs Animal Services Authority. He oversees the Meyers location, too. What happens on the West Slope won't affect operations in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

This is Brzezinski's second stint with the agency. When he worked for the county from 2003-08 he spent about 1.5 years helping to find a spot for the shelter.

"We have an excellent architect who has designed numerous shelters around the country so he knows what is needed," Brzezinski said.

Right now adoptable cats are in cages in the front lobby. A facility in Latrobe houses livestock. The administration office is about a half mile from the main shelter. A special use permit is required because it is not zoned for an animal shelter.

The new facility will have everything in one spot. It will be designed to accommodate adoptions, the nearly 100 volunteers associated with the facility, housing for animals that are quarantined, animals that may be involved in a lawsuit or criminal case.

“Sheltering in general is almost like having a medical hospital. You have to have proper control. You have to have separate zonew for upper respiratory issues like kennel cough,” Brzezinski said. “Even though you have to have secure closures, they have to be comfortable for animals for the long term.”

Supervisors in May 2009 put $6 million into the capital improvement budget for the facility.

At a time when the county continues to reduce services and eliminate jobs, some question why it is spending the money now on something like this.

“Technically, yes, they could spend all that money for ongoing operations, but that is not something our office would advise they do because if you use it to fill an ongoing budget hole, it helps fill the hole in the budget year, but then the hole re-emerges the next rear. And then you don’t have anything to build anything with,” said Mike Applegarth, senior administrative analyst for El Dorado County.

Another reason to start this year is contractors are scrambling for work – making bids on projects lower than years past, plus it provides jobs.

Former supporters change stance on term limits

By Mike Zapler, San Jose Mercury News

The strictest term limits in the nation, enacted 20 years ago to end the “stench of greed and vote-selling” in Sacramento, have instead made California’s government so dysfunctional, many who once backed the reform say, that they now regret pushing for it.

“Of all the mistakes I’ve made in public life, the one I regret most is advocating for term limits for the Legislature,” said Rep. Tom McClintock, R-Granite Bay, a leading conservative figure in California who was one of a small number of incumbent legislators who backed the term limits measure two decades ago. “It has harmed the institution badly.”

Whether most Californians agree will be tested by a measure that qualified for the 2012 ballot last week. It would change term limits – currently six years in the Assembly and eight years in the Senate – to 12 years total in either chamber or both.

Read the whole story

Reno attracting second-home buyers

By Larry Olmsted, USA Today

Reno calls itself “The Biggest Little City in the World.” That’s meant to say it’s a small town with big-city amenities. But the reality is that its casinos, shops, restaurants and nightlife play second fiddle to the main attraction surrounding the city: the great outdoors.

“Outdoor recreation is huge here because we have so much sunshine. People love being outside,” says real estate agent Carrie Sieben of LL Realty. “Reno is the gateway to all of the many activities of northern Nevada and bordering California, yet it is very inexpensive.”

One of Reno’s biggest appeals is nearby Lake Tahoe. But luxury houses in Reno sell for the same as or less than small condos near the water’s edge. Single-family houses in golf communities start under $200,000. “Around Reno, you can buy a nice condo in the mid-$100,000s,” Sieben says.

Many second-home buyers find that giving up immediate access to pricey Lake Tahoe for an hour-long drive there is worth Reno’s reasonable prices, its big-city amenities and access to skiing, golf and other outdoor sports. Access is excellent via the Reno airport.

Read the whole story

Do you like food and wine?

What does the phrase “Sample the Sierra” mean to you?

Write a poem, a short essay, a story, a memory – something honest conveying what those three words symbolize to you. Send it to info@LakeTahoeNews.net, along with a photo to illustrate the words or a photo of yourself. In the document, put your full name and phone number. Your number will not be published.

Lake Tahoe News will publish some of the articles. The winning entry will receive two tickets to the Aug. 21 Sample the Sierra event on Ski Run Boulevard.

Submissions must be received by Aug. 13 at 5pm.

Help for El Dorado, Alpine, Placer small businesses

By Darrell Smith, Sacramento Bee

An estimated 22,000 businesses call Placer, El Dorado and tiny Alpine counties home.

For much of its existence, the Auburn-based Golden Sierra Workforce Investment Board has focused on matching workers with those businesses, building a pipeline between potential employee and entrepreneur.

The federally funded investment board works with local

businesses and business groups to provide job training, placement and other employment-related services.

But firms in these mostly rural counties are struggling under the weight of a sluggish economy. As unemployment in the region soared, Golden Sierra has shifted its focus, said Executive Director Jason Buckingham.

Read the whole story

V&T train detrailment closes Highway 342 near Gold Hill

By Reno Gazette-Journal

Highway 342 near Gold Hill remains closed this morning after a V & T train derailment on Sunday night.

The road will remain closed until at least 9 a.m. Monday while crews work to get the train back on the rails, Nevada Highway Patrol spokesman Chuck Allen said.

Read the whole story