Truckee River rafting open in Tahoe City

The dam gates are open and the river is flowing, and rafting along North Shore's Truckee River is open.

Tahoe City-based Mountain Air Sports and the Truckee River Raft Company opened this week and are in full operation.

The companies offer self-guided, leisurely five-mile floats down the Truckee River.

Most trips take two to three hours to complete, with patrons exiting at River Ranch Lodge near Alpine Meadows Road along Highway 89. Guests can park in Tahoe City and take free shuttles back to their vehicles after the float anytime before 6pm. Hours of operation are 8:30am to 3:30pm daily (weather permitting) and footwear is mandatory. Trips include parking, shuttle, paddles, life jackets and commercial rafts for two-20 people. Group rates are available.

According to Chad Blanchard, chief deputy water master, currently 200 cubic feet per second is being released from the Tahoe City Dam, Lake Tahoe's only water outlet, which may increase due to the drops in the natural flow and snowmelt.

Forest Service has plans for Angora Fire restoration

Terri Marceron, superintendent of the Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit, has signed off on the Angora Fire Restoration Project.

The project area encompasses the boundary of the 3,100-acrea burn area.

Copies of the decision and maps of the project area are available at the Forest Service office at 35 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe.

“This project represents our final stage of planning for restoration activities on National Forest System lands within the Angora Fire area. Project activities include management of fire, fuels, vegetation, and forest health, wildlife habitat, aquatic habitat and hydrologic function restoration, roads and trails, and invasive weeds,” Forest Service officials said.

Appeals to the decision may be made until Aug. 23 to Randy Moore, regional forester, 1323 Club Drive, Vallejo, CA 94592.

– Compiled by Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe blasts county for being uncooperative

Dear Publisher,

Many of us are working collaboratively on the development of a regional prosperity plan for the Lake Tahoe Basin that calls for good green economic planning and collaboration among government, private-sector organizations and the Lake Tahoe

South Shore Chamber of Commerce. It is a remarkable planning effort that requires tools and strategies at the local level to make it all happen. Isn't it a shame that city government now has to respond to threats of costly lawsuits from El Dorado County, when we should be meeting and discussing ways to resolve outstanding differences of opinion?

The City Council received a letter from El Dorado County Board of Supervisors signed by Board Chairman Norma Santiago threatening the city of South Lake Tahoe with a lawsuit if the City Council does not immediately revoke the ordinance adopting RDA Project Area No. 2 and make other concessions to county government. The letter is being carefully reviewed by me, the city attorney, and staff and it will be brought to the City Council shortly for review and action.

As a resident of South Lake Tahoe and city manager, I would have hoped for our district county supervisor and our county government to support our efforts to improve our community and economy. The Tahoe region and people and businesses inside South Lake Tahoe are suffering [17.8 percent unemployment in the city limits] I would hope and expect county government to be collaborative and cooperative partners who demonstrate through their actions that they care about the 24,000 residents and many business owners and operators here, and they are supportive of efforts to improve our local economy. From the beginning of my tenure here eight years ago, I have heard city residents and business owners and operators complain that county elected leaders have not always demonstrated by their actions that they share the concerns we have about the future of our community. They cite as examples the following El Dorado County actions:

1. Dropping a lawsuit on the Shingle Springs Casino [Red Hawk] and then telling our community that a new casino would have no adverse economic impact on the South Shore;

2. Denying a request of the City Council to meet with county

elected leadership to discuss the transfer of the county courthouse to the state even though the agreement with the county for the use of the city property requires City Council approval before any transfer can legally occur;

3. Denying a request by the city on behalf of the city and county to accept a federal grant of $1.4 million to bring money into the city and county to forestall foreclosures and help to stabilize the housing market. The board rejected the grant and cooperative effort even though the county would have received most of the funds and county residents most of the benefits:

4. Having a prominent long-time county supervisor in another district say in both private and public that he doesn't want the county paying for services to city and county residents in the city's District V because our high unemployment costs the county too much money. He suggests forming a new county and ridding El Dorado County of us.

5. Being perceived to treat the South Shore officials and local trade organizations in their rhetoric as second-class citizens.

There is tremendous support in the city and Tahoe region to improve the economy, and collaborative efforts are underway both inside the city and with our regional economic prosperity partners. Residents and business owners want a strong and viable local economy. In the city, as demonstrated in the December 2008 Community Survey, town-hall meetings on Redevelopment Project Area No. 2 [RDA] and at RDA No. 2 hearings before the City Council and Planning Commission, the people want steps take to support economic growth, see capital improvements made to their community without more taxes on the people, support workforce housing, and see new private-sector investment that creates good jobs. Doing nothing is not an option. I want and I think most people who live and work here want a county supervisor and county government to support our

economic improvement efforts and be real partners and supporters of economic growth using the best tool we have in South Lake Tahoe to do so in this complicated, expensive, and heavily government-regulated area known as the Tahoe Region. If we had a strong local economy and put local people back to work the County would benefits … everyone wins.

The City Council and city staff gave county government every opportunity to comment and engage in conversation with the city on the formation of RDA No. 2 beginning in 2009. The preparation of a Redevelopment Plan for RDA No. 2 has not been a secret and a matter of public discussion for several years. City staff presented the proposed RDA No. 2 plan before the Board of Supervisors earlier this year. The county sat on its proverbial hands for many months until the last minute and then demanded changes in the plan. Even then, the City Council graciously acquiesced and initially reduced the size of the proposed RDA No. 2 project area as a concession to county demands only to have the County continue to oppose the plan and want more concessions. Even after adoption of the RDA Project Area No. 2 Plan, city officials offered to continue dialogue with the county [June 7 letter to the county administrative officer, June 17 email to Supervisor Santiago] and the county was silent up until now when they demand revocation of the RDA No. 2 ordinance recently passed by the City Council.

County government officials should have followed the example of our colleagues at STPUD who originally had serious objections to RDA No. 2 but continued dialogue with City officials on ways to overcome their objections. We are very close to an agreement with STPUD as a result of our continuing dialogue and an agreement will be reached. STPUD officials have been respectful, courteous, engaged and acted responsibly and reasonably.

I believe that city officials and residents want a cooperative and collaborative elected County government leadership who

cares about the 24,000 people who live here and is willing to work with and support efforts of City government to improve our economy. When we improve our economy, everyone [city and county] benefits. Sadly, the county is opposed to a new RDA Project Area No. 2 because of their abnormal fear of losing future property tax revenue. If we don't do the right things now in the South Shore to grow the economy, we will not have new property tax revenues in the future to meet city or county needs.

Getting along with county government is fine and a noble and productive goal as long as it results in the needs of the residents of South Lake Tahoe and the South Shore being met. We need to communicate, collaborate and cooperate with county government without threats and intimidation and the city will certainly engage in meaningful dialogue.

Dave Jinkens, South Lake Tahoe city manager

Arizona fugitive arrested in South Lake Tahoe

An Arizona man wanted on 12 counts of fraud and forgery was arrested in South Lake Tahoe on July 14.

El Dorado County sheriff's detectives tracked down John William Rodriguez at a house on Eloise Avenue. He was booked at the South Lake Tahoe jail for a local misdemeanor warrant as well as a no bail felony fugitive warrant from Arizona.



John William Rodriguez

Rodriguez had been fraudulently representing himself as a U.S. Marine, an Iraq war veteran, an FBI agent and a detective with the Department of Veteran's Affairs, among other things, according to sheriff's Lt. Les Lovell. Rodriguez often wore the uniform of a U.S. Marine, gained access to military installations and attended functions such as the Marine Corps Ball.

The El Dorado County Sheriff's Office is asking anyone familiar with Rodriguez to contact Detective Matt Harwood at (530) 573.3015.

Flash flood warning issued for Tahoe-Reno area

The National Weather Service in Reno has issued a flash flood watch for the greater Lake Tahoe area from 1pm today through the evening.

The warning includes portions of East Central California and Western Nevada, including Reno, Carson City and the Minden areas, and Mineral and southern Lyon counties.

Abundant moisture and strong instability over the area will

allow showers and thunderstorms to produce heavy rain today, weather officials said. The stronger storms may produce rainfall rates of at least 1 inch per hour and bring the potential for flash flooding.

The greatest risk for flash flooding are locations near small creeks and streams, canyons, steep terrain and urban areas. Heavy rain may quickly flood dry creeks, wash out roads and create rock slides.

Explaining Barton’s health care costs

By Dick Derby

Where do your health care dollars go? Understanding the costs behind health care begins with knowledge of the components driving those costs. The price a patient sees on a hospital bill reflects the cost of the people who care for them and who are available around the clock, not just the services provided. Statistics show the lion’s share of the higher costs in hospitals are directly linked to the high cost of medical education, the treatment of under and uninsured patients and the admission of patients through the emergency room. What hospitals charge and what hospitals get paid are two very different things. Medicare and MediCal pay less than the real cost of providing services to the patient.

Hospital employees must be compensated to care for patients 24 hours a day, seven days a week including physicians, nurses and caregivers at the bedside, pharmacists, lab staff, food service and housekeeping personnel and many other specially trained staff. In addition, nonprofit community hospitals,

such as Barton provide necessary medical services and benefits for the entire population they serve, regardless of a patient’s ability to pay.



Dick Derby

So what does all of this mean for patients of Barton Health? As a nonprofit health care organization, Barton will continue to perform its historical and critical role of delivering health care services to everyone regardless of their ability to pay. Barton Health is ethically and legally bound to contribute to the health of our community. Barton’s earnings are returned to the organization. This comes in the form of everything from offering health care to everyone who walks through our door, investing in the latest technology, offering innovative programs and best meeting the health care needs of our community.

A portion of the earnings are used to improve quality, service and efficiency for which we consistently strive to offer our patients. Additional investments are made in “community benefit” programs, services and products to improve the overall health of our residents.

Community benefits include education, prevention initiatives, medical screenings, support groups and special health education events. Examples of some of the investments that Barton has made are:

• Offering discounted services such as at-cost seasonal flu shots, free H1N1 flu vaccinations and Barton’s discounted Wellness Lab Draws and EKGs.

• Providing no fee or a discounted fee for health care services such as primary care, specialty care and preventive services such as those offered at our Community Clinic which treated nearly 18,000 under or uninsured patients in 2009 – up nearly 11 percent from the prior year.

• Participating in local health planning efforts to identify and rank health needs. In 2009, Barton Health and the Barton Foundation provided more than $105,000 in free medical screenings and programs for our community. In 2010, Barton continues its screenings by holding events such as Latino Family Health Day and providing free screening booths at other large community events.

• Participating in disaster planning, preparation and collaboration with community agencies and partners for the safety of our residents and visitors.

• Providing medical education or research such as Barton's Orthopedic & Sports Medicine Fellowship program which trains other orthopedic surgeons from around the nation.

• Conducting education programs like Barton's health lectures offered at the Lake Tahoe Community College, the Lake Tahoe Senior Center, Barton University and other locations.

• Recruiting physicians to practice in our area, sometimes offering them financial support from Barton, to better serve our community by diversifying the medical services offered.

• Making donations and sponsoring health and fitness related programs for youth in the South Lake Tahoe, Carson City and Carson Valley areas.

The largest portion of Barton Health's community contribution comes in the form of Charity Care – health care provided for free or at reduced prices to low income patients. Although the tax law does not indicate how much charity care a nonprofit hospital is required to provide, Barton Health wrote off

nearly $4.7 million for charity care in 2009. The need for charity care is on the rise based on recent statistics provided by the California Health Care Foundation showing that charity care rose by 23 percent between 2001 and 2007 and shows no signs of slowing with high unemployment and uninsured rates.

As government services and programs continue to be cut, Barton Health strives to provide the necessary health programs to our service area, regardless of the patient's ability to pay. We continue to look at containing our costs to provide all of the above services and more to our community, while keeping our rates competitive with other hospitals in our region. We thank our residents and visitors for your continued support.

Dick Derby is vice president of finance at Barton Health.

Bill secures South Tahoe, Truckee's snow removal funds



By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe, Truckee and Mammoth no longer have to worry about coming up with additional money to pay for snow removal.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger on Thursday signed AB2704 – a bill introduced by Assemblyman Ted Gaines, R-Roseville, to protect snow removal funding for these jurisdictions.

Millions of dollars in the gas tax had been threatened to be taken from these mountain towns by the Legislature and governor.

South Lake Tahoe receives approximately $1.2 million annually from the gas tax. Of this amount, approximately $700,000 a year is for snow removal.

As recently as July 7, Mayor Kathay Lovell sent a letter to Schwarzenegger pleading the city's case for the Highway User Tax Account to not be raided. This money is for local street and road maintenance for all California cities, plus snow removal for mountain areas.

During last year's budget negotiations these dollars were threatened. Gaines introduced the legislation to remove the threat from future budget cycles – like the one the state is currently mired in.

Celebrities seem more important than the game of golf

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Autograph hounds were out Thursday at Edgewood Tahoe in hopes of securing a signature from one of the dozens of celebs on the golf course. Most were polite – but not all – which included fans and players.

Marcus Allen seemed a bit annoyed being asked for his autograph by young and older fans. One day the Hall of Fame running back might long for someone to recognize him.

Instead, he told people he had spent 30 minutes signing autographs already and that they could come back today if they wanted to try again.



AJ Hawk of the Packers spends time signing autographs July 15. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Course marshals warned a guy on the ninth hole yelling toward Aaron Rodgers if he used that type of language anytime during the three-day tournament, he would be bounced.

Rodgers ignored that side of the fairway when it came to signing autographs. Leaving the area a big smile crossed Rodgers' face when someone yelled, "Go, Bears." That would be Cal, not those guys in Chicago.

Rodgers is the all-pro quarterback for the Green Bay Packers. Although some Bay Area athletes are among the 80-plus roster, he is almost a local, having been born in Chico, and playing at Butte College and Berkeley.

Actor Don Cheadle made one couple's day after they convinced him to jog over to the rope at the putting green to have a picture taken of the three of them.

Several of the celebs took time to have their pictures taken with fans. Mostly it was programs being signed, but fans

offered up a few golf balls, T-shirts, and other memorabilia.

On Thursday it was mostly groups of five on the course – a foursome with a celeb. These four paid for the privilege to play a round of 18 at the Stateline golf course with a sports or Hollywood star.

Volunteers from the Lake Tahoe Education Foundation were on the ninth hole to give plaques to the non-celebs that had a photo of them with their playing partner that had been taken earlier in the day.

Guy Fieri of Food Network fame is supposed to be cooking up a storm today. He was calling Thursday to find out if he could have access to Edgewood's kitchen. An answer was not readily available.

This tournament, though serious for many of the players, is not the caliber of the British Open. For example, the ping of a golf ball against metal bleachers could be heard Thursday as someone completely missed the green. It can be dangerous to be a spectator – but a whole lot of fun, too.

AJ Hawk, burly linebacker for the Packers, almost seemed to blush when someone told him how good he looked in his blue shirt.

Actor Jack Wagoner and former Bronco QB John Elway were chatting it up at the driving range. As the 2006 winner of the American Century Championship, Wagner may have been giving Elway a bit of advice.

Today begins the three-day tournament – with a tinge more seriousness about to arrive at Edgewood Tahoe.

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Climber sets records at Yosemite

By Miranda Simon, Sacramento Bee

When Alex Honnold made it to the top of Yosemite's imperious Half Dome two years ago – rope-less but serene up to the last slab – tourists gathered to ask him if he was crazy.

Even the most hard-core climbers wonder how the 24-year-old Sacramento native can make it to the top without the protection of ropes and still manage to keep calm.

But June 24, the news was not about Honnold's insane gearless solo climbs but rather that he broke speed-climbing records on two notorious Yosemite rock formations. He climbed Half Dome in two hours and nine minutes, shaving 41 minutes off the old record, and then finished the day off with a six-hour climb of the majestic El Capitan with Swiss climber Ueli Steck.

Read the whole story

Lecture: Butterflies in the Lake Tahoe Basin

Although the Sierra Nevada is a North American butterfly diversity "hotspot," the Tahoe basin isn't. But that doesn't mean you can't attract a fascinating array of butterflies to your garden.

This talk will cover the species you are most likely to see, and touch on the rich fauna that you can access easily within just a few miles of the Basin.

Arthur M. Shapiro is a distinguished professor of Evolution and Ecology at UC Davis, where he has been on the faculty since 1971. His research focuses on the ecology and biogeography of butterflies, and he is the author of about 300 scientific papers as well as “Field Guide to the Butterflies of the San Francisco Bay and Sacramento Valley Regions” (UC Press, 2007).

Prior to the program, join the North Lake Tahoe Demonstration Garden for a Green Thumb garden tour from 4:45 to 5:30pm outside in the Demonstration Garden’s butterfly garden.

Date: Aug. 5

Time: 4:45pm garden tour outside in Demonstration Garden.

5:30pm No-Host Bar.

Program begins promptly at 6pm.

Cost: $5 donation requested.

Location: Assembly Room, Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village (on the campus of Sierra Nevada College).