Summer arrives in Tahoe because the calendar says so

By Kathryn Reed

Summer is here. Sometimes in Tahoe it takes looking at the calendar and not just outside to know this fact.

Mother Nature has been struggling to warm up this part of Sierra. Just last week the overnight lows were consistently in the 30s. The National Weather Service in Reno said some 30s are still possible in the coming nights, but expect 40s as well.

The highs are going to be in the upper 60s to low 70s into the weekend.



Trout Creek is running fast, wide and is close to the top of the bank. Photo/Kathryn Reed

“We are trying to get there,” Rudy Cruz, Weather Service specialist, said of normal temperatures.

Systems in Oregon and Washington are pushing down on Eastern

California and Western Nevada to create the afternoon cloudiness.

With unusual systems off the Northern California coast, it means more wind in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Thunderstorms are in the forecast for the afternoons this week, too.

The Upper Truckee River in Meyers is running about 200 to 250 cubic feet per second.

“Most of the melting occurred a few weeks ago,” Cruz said of the snow melt.

Trout Creek behind Lake Tahoe Community College looks like it could overflow its banks.

The American River along Highway 50 is rushing, producing rapids rarely seen.

South Lake Tahoe Public Works Director John Greenhut said no flooding has occurred to date in the city with the high rivers.

Lake Tahoe is still above its natural rim of 6,223 feet. On June 22 it was at 6,224.52 feet. But the toll of three consecutive drought years is adding up. In late June 2008 the lake level was at 6,225.26 feet.

Once the snow in the higher elevations is done filling the tributaries of Lake Tahoe and the weather warms to cause greater evaporation, it’s possible the lake will go below its natural rim. That means no water on the other side of the dam in Tahoe City, which in turn spells trouble for users downstream in Reno.

Confusing bid documents delay Lakeview Commons project

By Kathryn Reed

Convoluted bid documents sent out by South Lake Tahoe officials are delaying construction of Lakeview Commons by more than a month. The soonest work at El Dorado Beach could begin is Aug. 16.

Lakeview Commons is the name of what had been called the 56-acre project. The plan is to revitalize the entire area on both sides of Highway 50, with work on the lake side the priority and the only portion that money has been secured for.



The retaining wall above El Dorad Beach is collapsing. Photo/Kathryn Reed

"I looked at the bid documents and there is serious ambiguity," City Attorney Patrick Enright told the City Council on Tuesday. "We will try to go with a cleaner bid so we know what is in each line item."

The city thought it had a contractor lined up, but when it came time to draw up a contract confusion arose as to what exactly was expected.

The council voted 4-0, with Councilman Hal Cole absent, to reject the four bids that were received and to start all over.

BJ Sullivan, president of Clark & Sullivan, said it wasn't fair to his company to start from scratch.

"If I wasn't the low bidder, I'd think it was a good idea to rebid the job also," Sullivan said. "It's a relatively simple job. I feel it's unfair you rebid the job because they will know our numbers."

The company's attorney, Pat Markham, also addressed the council. His contention is the letter of intent from the city for his client to be the contractor on the multi-million project should be binding. To this, Enright said, only action from the council is binding.

Enright's concern with going forward with the current bid documents is the wording is apt to leave the city and any contractor disputing for years the intent of the language used. The inability to draw up a workable contract is what led him to this conclusion.

Jim Marino, assistant engineer for the city, said the plan for the next set of bid documents to be more clear on what is expected to be built, with other parts of the project listed as add-ons. The two primary concerns are fixing the hazardous retaining wall and building the boathouse.

The dilapidated wall is what pushed the project to the forefront when it came time for the California Tahoe Conservancy to secure state bond dollars for the project.

Although that money is still on its way to the South Shore from Sacramento, everyone associated with the $6 million

believes it will arrive within 10 days.

Peter Eichar, who has been spearheading the project for the CTC, told *Lake Tahoe News* all the paperwork has been sent to Sacramento.

“This project really has some great potential. Maybe this is the start of something big. We are due for something around here,” Eichar said.

It’s possible the boathouse could be erected to meet the Oct. 15 grading deadline and then have the interior worked on over the winter. The boathouse will be used for non-motorized watercraft storage.

The project was always expected to take two building seasons. The delay means less gets accomplished this summer and more will be done in 2011.

Add-ons to the project that could get done next year include the cantilever walkway at the east end of the project.

When the project does go back out to bid the city’s Public Works Department would like to incorporate the city’s ordinance giving preference to local contractors.

The council on June 22 delayed first reading of the ordinance until the July 13 meeting to incorporate additional language into the document. It’s likely everything will be in place so Lakeview Commons would be the first project to use the local contractor preference mandate.

Yacht club’s annual Blessing of the Boats

The South Lake Tahoe Yacht Club Annual Blessing of the Boats is June 27 at Camp Richardson Marina. The Club members will organize their boats in the Home Owner’s Cove of Tahoe Keys at 9:45am.

The boats will move onto the lake at about 10am and then proceed to the the Camp Richardson Marina for the “Blessing of the Boats” by club member the Ret. Rev. John Grace.

Members of the public who are interested in having their boats blessed are invited to join at the end of the line as it passes through the mouth of the Keys.

A Yacht Club Membership Drive is planned for 1-4pm at the Yacht Clubhouse located in the old boat house next to the Beacon restaurant.

This event is open to the boating public who may be interested in learning more about the South Lake Tahoe Yacht Club and the many activities it offers to the members. Appetizers, soft drinks, coffee and tea will be provided.

The newly published recipe book created by the South Lake Tahoe Yacht Club – “Our Favorite Recipes” – will be available for a $20 donation. Proceeds benefit CASA, Boy & Girls Club, and the South Lake Tahoe Women’s Center.

For more information about the activities, call Commodore Jeff Williams at (530) 542.1583.

El Dorado CASA earns national grant

Court Appointed Special Advocates El Dorado received a $27,500 grant through National CASA.

“This $27,500 grant has a significant impact on our program and the services we provide to our community children,” Executive Director Susan Dorsey said in a press release.

The grant dollars will support a unique and much-needed new position that will provide training for new advocates on the West Slope and South Lake Tahoe as well as case management for advocates on the West Slope.

The program served more than 400 youth in 2009.

CASA volunteers are appointed by judges to watch over and advocate for abused and neglected children, to ensure that they don’t get lost in the overburdened legal and social service system or languish in an inappropriate group or foster home.

What Nevada is doing isn’t working

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the June 20, 2010, Reno Gazette-Journal.***

Nevada has been at or near the bottom of so many national rankings over the years that residents seemingly have stopped paying attention.

Everyone should sit up and take notice, however, of Friday's news that the state now leads the nation in unemployment.

Until this month, Nevadans could take at least a small amount of solace in the fact that things were even worse in Michigan, which was hard hit by the troubles of the automobile industry.

No longer. We are now No. 1, with a 14 percent unemployment rate in May (the latest numbers available), and the state's political and business leaders should be embarrassed.

Read the whole story

Incline's runaway truck ramp accident not the first

Publisher's note: ***Click here to read about the driver of the truck.***

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

At least three other trucks launched off the end of an Incline Village runaway truck ramp before the one that crashed into a home Friday and killed a truck driver trapped in his burning rig, fire officials said Monday.

Nevada Highway Patrol investigators combed the charred wreckage of the truck, removed Friday night. The driver's identity was withheld while the Washoe County medical examiner's office awaits X-rays to provide positive identification.



The Incline Village house the big-rig careened into is a total loss. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The driver died Friday morning after his flatbed truck, hauling lumber, apparently lost its brakes while traveling west on the Mount Rose Highway. He steered into an uphill-slanted gravel runaway ramp near Nevada 28 but the ramp failed to stop the speeding vehicle.

The truck vaulted off the end of the ramp, slammed into a nearby residence and exploded. The occupant of the home escaped but rescuers were unable to reach the truck driver, who died in the flames.

Read the whole story

Hazmat drill in South Tahoe on June 28

The South Lake Tahoe Fire Department will be hosting a multi-jurisdictional hazardous materials drill at the El Dorado

Beach area on June 28 from 9am-3pm.

This drill will consist of a simulated hazmat situation. This drill will be utilized to hone the response skills of the area firefighters and other responders as well as the command and control functions used by the incident commander. The theme is cooperation, competency and standardization allowing the various jurisdictions to operate as a unified body.

Furlough day for LTUSD, 13% spike in health insurance costs

By Kathryn Reed

To save $200,000 in the 2010-11 Lake Tahoe Unified School District budget, three classified positions have been axed and 12.5 hours a day of elementary office assistants slashed.

The decision came Tuesday night even though it won't be until this afternoon that the California School Employees Association votes to ratify the one-year agreement.

The school board voted 5-0 to ratify one-year contracts with CSEA and South Tahoe Educators Association.



Lindsey Oakes tells the LTUSD board why Lia Story should keep her job. Photos/Kathryn Reed

It was a bit of an emotional process. About a dozen South Tahoe High School cheerleaders stood in support of Lia Story, who is their coach and works in the school office.

In the shuffle of positions, as of today she will be out of a job soon. Though the positions are set in stone, the people aren't necessarily locked out of a job. How things work, the most junior on the totem pole of the job classification being eliminated loses their job. On the flip side, that person rises to the top of the re-hire list over people from outside the district. That means people who believe they are out of a job, like Story, could end up with a job by the time the 2010-11 school year starts the week before Labor Day because it's possible others may voluntarily leave the district.

"She is kind of a like a mom to me," Lindsey Oakes said of Story. "She was directly involved in helping me graduate. I'm not sure I would have graduated (last week) without her."

The students' teary pleas clearly moved the five-member board.

"We know if we let someone go in this community, there is no place for them to go," board member Sue Novasel said.

Novasel, Wendy David and Larry Green are expressed regret in having to cut positions.

Finding common ground

Bernadette Santana, representing the classified union and a

former school board member, spoke of the amicable process in reaching consensus. STEA President Deb Johnson and Human Resources Director Jim Watson said the same.



Bernadette Santana, CSEA presdent, praises the negotiation process.

This is a huge step forward in harmony among the district office, school board and bargaining units. It was only a few years ago that employees were picketing, filling board meeting with rancor and threatening to strike.

That’s not to say everything is peaceful. STHS teacher Derek Allister said he didn’t have a chance to vote on the contract and that it wasn’t until Tuesday afternoon that he learned about the loss of classified staff. Allister said he and other teachers are willing to endure more cuts if it means saving jobs.

“If you take a little out of my paycheck to keep them here, I will write that check,” Allister told the board.

(Per state law, teachers must be notified by March 15 of any layoffs. The district cut 5.688 positions at that time.)

The classified cuts include the attendance technician at STHS as of Jan. 30, administrative assistant at the district office, and half a position each of instructional aid tech and

pupil services secretary at South Tahoe Middle School.

All employees will have one furlough day, which will be Nov. 24. This brings the number of instructional days to 184.

With health insurance going up 13 percent, that in effect brings the take home pay down for everyone. The district has a cap of $9,232 that it pays for employee health benefits so it will not be picking up any of the costs associated with the increase. On average it will mean $1,500 more per employee per year for health insurance.

Part of the contract is classified staff are protected from mid-year cuts, except for bus drivers because routes can change based on enrollment.

Budget issues

Also at the meeting, the board approved the 2010-11 budget.

With this being the sixth time CFO Deb Yates has brought the issue before the board, not much was left to do but vote. Yates said she is hearing that further cuts by the state to education look unlikely. However, Sacramento for the umpteenth year missed its deadline to pass a budget.

Declining enrollment continues to plague the district. The loss of 139 students this year equates to $720,000 the district won’t receive next school year from the state.

The board has kept its commitment to class size reduction for K-3, though the ratio in grades 1-3 will go from 1:20 to 1:22.

Keeping cuts as far from students as possible has been the board’s mantra.

Green said it’s better to not have a new book than to make more cuts in staff. Books and supplies have been reduced from $2.96 million in the 2009-10 budget to $1.34 million in the 2010-11 budget. Supplies are all inclusive – including things

like toilet paper, light bulbs, pencils and paper.

‘Forests with a Future’ film

Explore Tahoe An Urban Trailhead presents “Forests with a Future” on July 7 at 2pm.

This is a U.S. Forest Service film featuring protecting old-growth trees, wildlife and communities in the Sierra Nevada.

It is free.

Explore Tahoe is located at 4114 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

For more information, call (530) 542.4637.

Energy grant to bring new lighting to South Tahoe

South Lake Tahoe received of a $131,311 grant from the California Energy Commission that will be used for energy-efficient lighting.

The money will be used on a custom retrofit and replacement of all 88 pedestrian walkway lights on Ski Run Boulevard to low-wattage LED lights and replacement of approximately 100 high-energy use florescent lights to low-wattage LED lights in the city’s parking garage and offices and replacement of standard

wall switches to motion detector light switches.

These projects will provide an immediate reduction in energy costs and expected long-term savings in maintenance costs.

The installation of the new efficient lighting will be handled primarily by city personnel to allow the majority of the cash to go directly to the equipment.