Mobile businesses under scrutiny on South Shore

By Kathryn Reed

Even though South Lake Tahoe adopted a resolution in July 2004 authorizing mobile vending services to operate in town, no regulations came with it. That is likely to change next week when the City Council is expected to discuss an ordinance regulating these businesses.

There was a short discussion during the first reading of the ordinance last week. The conversation bounced from businesses like Schwan's that can legally deliver food to people to unmarked trucks selling goods to people using pushcarts to sell food to people selling seafood door-to-door.



Schwan's is legal, but other mobile businesses are suspect on the South Shore. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The ordinance would clarify the requirements to own/operate a mobile vending service in the city, specify locations of operation, and establish health-safety regulations for the product and equipment.

El Dorado County has had a strict policy for a number of years. Sheriff's Lt. Les Lovell said his department has a zero tolerance policy for people operating businesses illegally out of their vehicles. No business license means a trip to jail.

Two repeat offenders were caught in May selling stereo equipment out of a white Suburban. The two men from out of town were arrested, the goods confiscated and $4,000 in cash seized. Sheriff's deputies made the arrest at the Rockwater restaurant in the city limits.

It's possible from the cash seized that victims could get restitution.

"Persons wishing to make a report should be prepared to show that they were victimized. Although these transactions are almost always in cash, that should not be hard at all (to prove) as they will probably have the equipment and possibly even have some paperwork," said Hans Uthe, El Dorado County assistant district attorney. "People who get taken in by the scam should not feel bad. These guys are very, very slick and highly persuasive."

Although the May incident involved a Suburban, the "White Van Scam" is occurring throughout the country. It almost seems to be organized or perhaps it's just copycat criminals.

It's a typical bait and switch crime. The seller sets up shop out of the vehicle on a street corner or in a parking lot with goods for sale at extremely reduced prices. They claim their store is overstocked or have some other story for wanting to get rid of the goods. The product might appear to be in the original packaging. A second seller distracts the buyer and that's where the switch often occurs. What ends up in their hands isn't what they thought they were buying.

Sometimes the equipment is so shoddy it causes complementary components to short out.

“Buyer beware,” is how Lovell describes it. “You get what you pay for.”

Lt. David Stevenson with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department wasn’t familiar with the “White Van Scam” and said these types of crimes come and go, though he hasn’t noticed an increase in them.

Lovell said one of his detectives or deputies will work undercover when a suspicious vehicle is selling goods.

“They see where the (suspect) is keeping the money, where they keep the receipt books so we know what to look for when we grab them,” Lovell said.

People selling produce from the side of the road often don’t have a business license and therefore are not regulated by the city or county. People selling firewood without a phone number posted are not always on the up and up either.

Lovell said he welcomes calls (530.577.3000) about people operating suspicious businesses in the county.

“It’s not fair to hardworking locals who pay taxes,” Lovell said of the illegal vendors/businesses.

Dugard wants nothing to do with biological father

By Robert Salonga, Contra Costa Times

Jaycee Dugard and her family are not interested in attempts by Dugard’s biological father to establish paternity, according to a family spokeswoman.

Dugard's biological father, Kenneth Slayton, initially expressed his desire to reunite with Dugard shortly after she resurfaced last fall following 18 years in captivity.



Jaycee Lee Dugard

A statement released today by Dugard spokeswoman Nancy Seltzer asserts that Slayton showed no investment in his daughter's life until her ordeal drew international attention.

When Dugard's mother, Terry Probyn, told Slayton she was pregnant, he showed no interest, according to the statement. It further says that Slayton had similar reaction upon learning of her kidnapping and during interviews with federal and local law enforcement officials.

Read the whole story

Sexual harassment workshop

The North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce and the Sierra Human Resources Association are offering "The Generations and Sexual Harassment" workshop June 23 from 9-11a, at the Cedar House Sport Hotel, 10918 Brockway Road in Truckee.

The workshop, required as per California's AB1825, brings businesses into compliance regarding sexual harassment in the

workplace. The topic is presented in an engaging and provocative way, from the perspective of generations working side-by-side.

The speaker is Laura Moriarty, president of Tahoe Training Partners.

Registration is $50 for North Lake Tahoe Chamber of Commerce and SHRA members and $60 for non-members. Seating is limited.

To register and for more information about the workshop, call Moriarty at (530) 573.0224 or Kym Fabel at (530) 581.8764. Attendees can also register online at www.sierrahra.com.

Stateline's Villalobos files for bankruptcy

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Buried under gambling debts and a lawsuit accusing him of bribing pension fund officials, former CalPERS board member Alfred Villalobos has filed for bankruptcy protection.

The Chapter 11 reorganization petition, filed last week in Reno, creates a major new wrinkle in California's lawsuit against Villalobos – and touches off a tug-of-war over his vast fortune.

Villalobos lost control of his holdings last month. Lawyers for Attorney General Jerry Brown, arguing that the Stateline man would squander his money supporting his "prolific" gambling habit, seized his assets in order to pursue a $95 million lawsuit against him alleging bribery and fraud.

Read the whole story

Reno firm helping clean oil covered beaches

By Lenita Powers, Reno Gazette-Journal

BeachTech, a Reno firm that sells beach cleaning machines, has been helping the city of Gulf Shores, Ala., remove tar balls from its coastline and recently sold 10 of the machines to BP, its sales manager said today.

Scott Merrill, BeachTech's sales manager, said officials for BP, the British company that owned the Deepwater Horizon rig that exploded in April and touched off the worst oil spill in U.S. history, came down last weekend to see how effective the machines are.

"Last week, some BP honchos came down to see what we were doing and we got an order for 10 machines that night," Merrill said.

Read the whole story

Tour de Nez winner looking to

repeat

By Maggie Thach, Reno Gazette-Journal

There was no one around him. It was just Brett Melcher and the finish line. The wind was strong, but he could hear the spectators calling his name. All his focus pointed to crossing that line.

Tim Healion was leaning over the rail at the finish line, arm outstretched and waiting for a high five. Melcher, widely and affectionately known as “Bubba,” lifted his left arm. With that exchange, he had won a Tour De Nez for the first time in 13 tries.

“He’s a local guy and people have gone out there and seen him come in second or third or fourth,” said Healion, the Tour de Nez’s race director. “The crowd went crazy. It was extreme excitement.”

He has won other races – Melcher, 50, was a U.S. cycling national criterium champion in 2001 and 2004 and was ranked third in the country in the 45-49 Masters classification last year – but there was something special about the hometown guy winning the local race.

Read the whole story

Blood drive

Blood drive on June 26 from 7:30am-1:30pm at Tahoe Douglas Fire Department, Round Hill Station No. 3.

Workshop for businesses needing loans

A business loan clinic will be conducted June 22 from 9:30am–12:30pm at Lake Tahoe Community College.

Lenders will be present that support SBA lending programs that include:

* Business loans for business owner occupied commercial real estate and business equipment

* $500 – $2 million businesses loans for existing businesses with historic repayment ability

* $500 – $250,000 businesses loans for existing businesses

* Unsecured loans up to $25,000 available

* Free technical assistance

* All owners must be present to apply

Loans for start-ups businesses (less than two years in operation) require the clients to receive business counseling from a technical assistance provider before approved loans are disbursed. The counseling is free. The Greater Sacramento Small Business Development Center, the Nevada Small Business Development Center and the Nevada Microenterprise Initiative will have representatives available to schedule counseling. The loan clinic is for existing businesses only.

Begin the day with “Secrets to Success: Blue Ribbon Winners Workshop” featuring Melodie Ulman of Freshies, Jana Spano of Sealed with a Kiss and Ashley Mattila of Marcus Ashley

Galleries. The workshop will be before the loan clinic from 8–9:30am at the Lake Tahoe Community College, in the Creekside Room.

Seating is limited. Call (775) 588.1728 to RSVP for one or both workshops.

Lake Tahoe South Shore and North Lake Tahoe chambers of commerce, California and Nevada Small Business Development Centers, government agencies, banks, non-bank lenders, a certified development company, and the Future Business Leaders of Lake Tahoe Club are the hosts.

Ex-Tahoe CCC employee wins retaliation lawsuit

By Andy Furillo, Sacramento Bee

A woman who spoke up for female California Conservation Corps members who were the targets of alleged sexual transgressions won a retaliation lawsuit Tuesday from the state agency that had fired her.

Margaret Grodzik won a $159,000 award from a Sacramento Superior Court jury, which also found that the CCC failed to reasonably accommodate the 66-year-old woman, who suffered from diabetes and a heart condition.

“Heroes come in all sizes and packages,” Grodzik’s lawyer, Jill P. Telfer, said after the verdict. “This one was a grandmother. She was tenacious. She went everywhere for help and exhausted every single avenue. Her last resort was the courtroom.”

Read the whole story

Lukewarm optimism echoes at real estate symposium

By Austin Fay

INCLINE VILLAGE – “At least, it appears the worst is over.”

Economist Lawrence Yun gave a somewhat optimistic forecast to almost 500 agents from around the country during the multi-day National Association of Realtors’ Resort and Second Home Symposium at the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe in Incline.

Yun described the worldwide economic condition as a “100- or 200-year flood” that won’t happen again for “at least another 100 years.”



Lawrence Yun talks real estate numbers on June 14 in Incline. Photo/Austin Fay

“But right now we are in the midst of that flood and the

waters are beginning to recede," Yun said Monday.

International homebuyers from Brazil, India and China are expected to replace the baby boomers as the indispensable demographic in the U.S. resort and second-home market. About one-third of all international resort and second homes sales are to Canadians and Mexicans.

As long as people around the world see the U.S. as a symbol of financial security and are "putting American dollars underneath their mattresses," the long-term prospects are sound, Yun assured the Realtors.

Yun is the chief economist of the NAR and has a decorated past, having been instrumental in the shift from a centralized economy to a market-based economy after the collapse of the Soviet Union. He also helped establish economics departments in Russian universities.

California's outlook: Slow recovery

California's median price for a single-family home could double as a barometer for the national resort and second-home market. There is a strong correlation between resort and second-home sales to primary residences in California. California is often referred to as one big resort in real estate circles.

There were side conversations at the convention about home prices becoming inflated again as the market begins to turn around. In the first quarter of 2008, $246,000 was the median price for a house sold in California. For the same quarter in 2009, it was $305,000 – a 21 percent increase.

The trend hasn't reached Tahoe quite yet. In South Lake Tahoe, median home sales price in the first quarter of 2009 (excluding Tahoe Keys) was $326,000 (16 percent decline from 2008 median price of $390,000); the median home sales price in the first quarter of 2010 was $317,500, a decrease of 3

percent from last year.

This trend indicates the decline in median prices on the South Shore is slowing.

As for the Tahoe City and North Shore (excluding Incline Village), median sales prices for the first three months of 2010 was $453,000 versus the same period in 2009 at $400,000. That's a 12 percent increase.

These statistics indicate the North Shore median home price is about 4 percent higher than the South Shore in the first part of 2010.

Deb Howard of Deb Howard & Co. was instrumental in bringing the symposium to Incline Village. She's been apart of the NAR since its inception eight years ago and is a 31-year real estate veteran in South Lake Tahoe.

When asked if elements of the keynote speeches were alarming or disturbing, Howard told *Lake Tahoe News* concerns of a supply shortage could spell inflated home prices.

"That's just one of those little sleeper things … with population growth, immigration, and the lack of financial support to develop, we're going to have a real collision, then here we go again," Howard said, in reference to her feeling of impending inflation in resort and second-home markets.

However, housing markets across the nation, including the resort and second-home markets, are plagued by excess supply.

Steve Goddard, president of the California Association of Realtors, has a different take on the state of the housing market of California.

"We're coming back and doing quite well now … the investors and the buyers have discovered that the California market has stabilized, and if they want to buy property, now is the time," Goddard said, lightly pounding the lectern as he stood

giving his blend of sales pitch and speech.

One could say now is the time to buy in Nevada too because of the abundance of foreclosures. Nevada is No. 1 in the nation in foreclosure rates, with one in every 74 homes receiving a foreclosure notice.

Linda Rheinberger, president of the Nevada Association of Realtors, spoke of her “new friends” Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, and the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

The state is struggling to hedge its spiraling unemployment and foreclosure rates. Nevada’s recovery is greatly intertwined with the national tourism and gaming industry. For the past two years gaming revenues have been in steep decline because of the recession as many of Nevada’s visitors are holding onto their discretionary dollars much tighter.