Tahoans honored by Nevada tourism agency

Bruce Rettig of Meyers was one of 11 people honored Thursday with a VolunTourism Awards at the Nevada Commission on Tourism's 20th Rural Roundup conference.

"Volunteers are vital to promoting tourism in rural Nevada because they care deeply about enhancing their community's tourism attractions, and their work is a labor of love," Lt. Gov. Brian K. Krolicki, NCOT chair, said in a press release. "We are very proud of our devoted rural tourism volunteers, we appreciate their fine work, and these awards are our way of thanking them."

Nevada's six tourism territories selected the VolunTourism recipients, and one award was given posthumously, to the late Gene Kaplan of Wells, who died in 2008. In addition, four outstanding individuals who have contributed decades of hard work received Tourism Lifetime Achievement awards.

In addition to the tourism awards, Brittany Masin, 17, an Incline Village High School senior, received the 2010 June Stannard Memorial Scholarship, which she will apply toward studies for a major in hospitality management at UNLV.

Receiving VolunTourism awards in each territory were:

Indian Territory – Bruce Rettig, a Web designer and president/owner of Charter Advertising/Design, at Lake Tahoe, for sharing his marketing and advertising expertise with Indian Territory and for his advocacy of American Indian historic resources.

Cowboy Country Territory – Peg and Gene Kaplan, for creating, restoring and promoting tourism attractions in Wells and Elko County.

Las Vegas Territory – Jennifer Mahar Mulder, associate publisher for Relocation Resources guide in Las Vegas for meeting planners, has been involved with the territory for only 10 months, but already has done a commendable job of instituting upgraded technology to streamline the membership program.

Nevada Silver Trails – Rebecca Elkins, with her husband, Jerry, own and operate the Horse Fly Ranch for guests in remote, scenic Monitor Valley north of Tonopah.

Pony Express Territory – Jan Morrison, entrepreneur and staunch promoter of tourism in historic Austin and Pony Express Territory, is founder-owner of Main Street Shops and St. Augustine's Catholic Church building, which she is transforming into a cultural arts center and tourism attraction.

Reno Tahoe Territory – Mary Reno, sales manager for the Silver Legacy Resort Casino in downtown Reno, for devoting her time and expertise to local and regional tourism-building programs and events.

Tourism Lifetime Achievement Awards honored two individuals and a couple for their decades-long passion and commitment to building rural tourism.

The winners are:

Virginia Ridgway of Goldfield, longtime, enthusiastic, resourceful rural tourism booster, authority on local history and created the concept of marketing area highways as Nevada Silver Trails.

Wally Cuchine of Eureka, manager of the historical Eureka Opera House and art gallery and a recipient of the Distinguished Nevadan Award from the University of Nevada Board of Regents, has championed cultural tourism statewide, serving on numerous boards ranging from Pony Express Territory

to the Nevada Humanities programming and grant-giving council. His love for art has created

Don and Carol Shanks of Pioche, a husband-wife team, have been unceasing supporters and leaders of tourism building and promotion in Nevada Silver Trails Territory.

Earth Hour focuses on climate change



During Earth Hour on March 27 at 8:30pm, hundreds of millions of people around the world will turn off their lights for one hour as a call to action on climate change.

From Mongolia to Argentina, the Arctic to Antarctica, from the Cook Islands to Russia and across the United States, lights at homes, businesses, government buildings and iconic landmarks will dim, making the switch toward creating a cleaner, safer and more secure future.

Already a record 115 countries have joined the movement and 6,000 cities are projected to participate.

In the U.S., 26 states have officially pledged to observe Earth Hour: Arkansas, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Maryland, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Tennessee, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Lights will be dimmed at some of the U.S.’s most iconic landmarks including Mount Rushmore in South Dakota, St. Louis’

Gateway Arch, Sea World in Orlando, the Las Vegas Strip, New York's Empire State Building and Chrysler Building, the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, Washington D.C.'s National Cathedral, California's Santa Monica Pier, and the Space Needle in Seattle. Internationally the Brandenburg Gate, Eiffel Tower, Hiroshima Peace Memorial, India Gate, and the world's tallest building Burj Khalifa in Dubai, UAE are all participating.

For more information, click here.

Lake Tahoe ski report, March 26



Fresh snow is covering the slopes of Lake Tahoe ski resorts. Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Questioning land swap and land use in South Tahoe

Dear California Tahoe Conservancy Board members,

The Conservancy may eventually make two important decisions

regarding the city's request to become the owner of two Conservancy properties. The uses of these properties will consequently change.

First, the city wants to annex property along Barbara Avenue for the purpose of building affordable housing. I have been wondering why it would want to do so since logic suggests that affordable housing would more appropriately be built in one of the two contemplated transect nodes. There, shopping, employment, public transportation and recreation are all within walking and biking distance. Public housing situated in one of the two nodes will have a mutually strengthening effect on both, helping to create some synergy between the various uses and activities that will hopefully thrive in these concentrated use areas.



South Lake Tahoe would like to own and then pave this lot at Los Angeles and Harrison avenues. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The city's proposal to build affordable housing in the middle of town and on the periphery of it will have just the opposite effect. Most important for the future of our town is the importance of building some viable alternative to the car as

the usual means of getting around. This goal is negated by city's proposal. If we are serious about building a public transportation system that works, the various involved agencies, the city and public must together give it consistent and solid support.

The second property that the city wants to purchase or use is adjacent to the *Tribune* building. It is a large parcel that ha never been built on. Along with some large beautiful trees, it is covered with the biological diversity characteristic of this region. It is especially attractive since the Conservancy did such a sensitive job of thinning out smaller trees. The city wants to put a parking lot on this lovely parcel. Now, I have some sympathy for the city's parking lot predicaments and to some extent the Conservancy shares them. But is the appropriate use for this parcel a parking lot, especially since the Baily coverage limits for Al Tahoe have been well exceeded? And again, the question: Do we really want public transportation to have a fighting chance at South Lake Tahoe? Every additional parking lot and tiered parking structure undermines the effort.

Nor can we achieve an aesthetic balance, the sense of ourselves as a coherent town, when so much highway frontage is solid black pavement and parked cars.

I realize the Conservancy has many difficult and controversial decisions to make. I wish you well in having to make these two additional decisions.

Very truly yours,

Gloria Harootunian, South Lake Tahoe

DCSD to narrow superintendent choices next week

By Kathryn Reed

Douglas County school board will have a special meeting March 30 to narrow the field of superintendent candidates to no more than three.

Six people were interviewed this week to run the district which has schools at the lake and in the Carson Valley. The closest candidate hails from Washoe County, with some from outside Nevada and one from Canada.

After the board decides on the finalists at the Monday meeting at 6pm in Minden, site visits and background checks will be conducted.

It’s possible the board will schedule another special meeting to pick the superintendent. The decision could also be made at the next regular meeting on April 13.

John Soderman is the interim superintendent. He took over for Carol Lark who resigned mid-school year.

He will begin the recruitment for a principal at Whittell High School. Sue Shannon gave notice this week she will be retiring from the Zephyr Cove school in June. It’s possible the next superintendent will have final say over who is at the helm of the 7-12 school.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Standards and Poors raised the South Tahoe Joint Powers Financing Authority bond rating from A- to AA-.

• SAFE Credit Union is offering $1,000 scholarships to students in the counties of El Dorado, Placer, Nevada, Amador, Sacramento, Yolo, Yuba, Sutter, Butte, Contra Costa, San Joaquin and Solano. Applications are due April 5. They are available at branches and here.

• Party Place, a one-stop shop for party needs, is going into the Factory Stores at the Y in South Lake.

• Artemis Mediterranean Grill is opening in the Kings Trading Post center in South Tahoe.

• Lake Tahoe USD's Destination Imagination Team placed second in the regional tournament and is going to state in San Jose on April 10. This is the third year that this team has been together, having placed fourth at state in 2009. The team is seventh-graders Alexis Maya, Samantha Buscher, Kellen Gronwold, sixth-graders Bailey Barcellos, Scott Carlson, and fifth-graders Meg Carlson and Kamren Gronwold.

• Brooks Martin of South Lake Tahoe was named doctor of the year by Barton Memorial Hospital employees.

El Dorado wineries find receptive drinkers in The City

El Dorado County’s wineries recently brought their version of gold from the Sierra Foothills to San Francisco and returned with valuable sales leads and exposure to a new, appreciative audience.

Approximately 300 trade members and consumers enjoyed medal-winning Zinfandel, Bordeaux, Rhone and Burgundian varietals poured by 24 wineries in the posh surroundings of Postrio Restaurant near Union Square.



Diane Stading, owner of Auriga Cellars in El Dorado County, talks with a member of the wine trade in San Francisco. Photo/Provided

It was the first San Francisco trade/consumer tasting conducted by the El Dorado Winery Association. Winery representatives picked up several sales leads and enjoyed introducing people to El Dorado -– a region gaining

recognition for its diversity of award-winning wines.

Beth Jones, owner of Lava Cap Winery in Placerville and president of the El Dorado Winery Association, was pleased to receive inquiries from several restaurants on pricing and availability of Lava Cap wines including Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Zinfandel. She also was able to visit with travel and trade media during the tasting.

“The event opened up several new sales avenues, not only for Lava Cap, but for all of our association’s wineries,” Jones said.

Miraflores Winery winemaker Marco Capelli poured alongside manager Matricia Haigood.

“It was a perfect event for getting in touch with the San Francisco marketplace, and great exposure to consumers who were not familiar with El Dorado,” Haigood said. “We came away with several restaurant leads that our local distributor can use to expand our sales interests in the Bay Area.”

EDWA plans to conduct similar tastings in other cities the future.

South Tahoe gang members plead guilty

South Lake Tahoe police officers are calling this week’s sentencing of three gang members the dismantling of the command structure of the Cyclones street gang.

Jorge Casillas, Carlos Trejo and a 16-year-old male pleaded guilty to first degree burglary, assault with a deadly weapon

and participating in a criminal street gang in the June stabbing of a 15-year-old South Lake Tahoe youth.

Casillas was given 11 years and four months in state prison for the June incident and an earlier crime involving a gun. Trejo's sentence is one year in county jail and five years of probation. The teenager will be sentenced later.

The Cyclones street gang is a clique associated with the South Side, or Sureño, street gangs originating in Southern California and the California State Prison system.

This is the second such street gang in South Lake Tahoe to have its command structure deconstructed by South Lake Tahoe gang investigators in the last year. By November 2009, several East Side Familia gang members and their leader had been arrested on charges ranging from drug sales to firearms and attempted homicide. The East Side Familia was a local street gang associated with the North Side, or Norteño street gangs, also originating in Southern California and the California State Prison system.

These investigations have led to the identification of several street gangs operating in and about South Lake Tahoe, with more than 500 gang members and their associates being contacted. The Cyclones and East Side Familia street gangs are only two of the street gangs contacted by police gang officers. Other gangs range from tagging crews, white supremacist and non-traditional street gangs.

Although the police department's gang officers view these convictions as victories, they also view them with concern. It is not uncommon for street gangs to re-assemble command structure or to splinter off forming other street gangs once their core has been disrupted.

The police department has formed a new task force to deal with new threats to investigating officers involved in this attempted homicide investigation.

Bijou school seeks $300,000 grant to turn scores around



By Kathryn Reed

Money is so often touted as the difference between high and low academic performing schools.

Bijou Community School might get to test that theory. Bijou expects to receive a nearly $300,000 grant in May that must be spent by Sept. 30. The grant may prove money does make a difference when it comes to education performance.

Bijou is in the lower socio-economic echelon in the district. For many, English is not their first language nor is it spoken at home.

Bijou is just one of many troubled schools in the state. On Wednesday, the Nation's Report Card was released. California shared last place for reading scores with Louisiana, Arizona, New Mexico and Washington, D.C. New Jersey and New York are at the top. Those states spend close to twice the amount of money per child than the roughly $8,000 California doles out.

The South Lake Tahoe elementary is one of about 200 schools at the bottom of the rung, according California Department of Education stats released this month. Even so, it has made significant improvements, especially with the 64-point gain on the 2009 Academic Performance Index.

The API is part of the federal No Child Left Behind mandate. NCLB has criteria for schools to meet based on comparing apples to oranges in that this year's fourth-graders' tests will be compared to last year's instead of each grade level showing improvement or a decline from year to year.

It's possible if Bijou does well on this year's tests, it would be off the federal watch list.

It was decided at the Lake Tahoe Unified School District meeting Tuesday that Bijou would bypass going after American Recovery and Reinvestment Act dollars because the strings attached mandate that by the first day of next school year, which begins in August, one of the following intervention models would have to be implemented:

• replace the principal and at least 50 percent of the staff;

• close Bijou and convert it to a charter;

• close Bijou and enroll the students at higher-achieving schools in LTUSD;

• transform the school by changing how students are taught.

"There's no logic involved. It's offensive," Jim Watson, director of Human Resources, said of the intervention models. "(Bijou) has taken on this challenge of improvement whole-heartedly already. It doesn't make sense to close, disband or give-away that school."

The $300,000 the school is going after is a federal School Improvement Grant. The plan is to have 18 days of summer school starting in July for more than half of the 500 students. The school day would be 3.5 hours.

Principal Karen Tinlin and her staff devised a plan last week to bring in Guided Language Acquisition Development trainers to teach the staff for a couple days in this method and then have it used on the students in the summer.

“It’s a program that really does help our English learners, which is where we struggle,” Tinlin said.

Parents would be part of the process. Technology like Netbooks and white boards could be bought with the funds. The grant pays for all supplies, teacher time, necessary meals, support staff and the coaches.

Bijou will know in May if was awarded the grant. Watson said there is no reason to believe the school won’t get the money.

Soroptimist: Giving a voice to women throughout the world

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – “In spite of all the progress we have made in the last 100 years, women and children are the most oppressed group in the world, including our own country.”

Cathy Standiford, president of Soroptimist International of the Americas, conveyed that sobering reality as the guest speaker Wednesday of Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe.



Cathy Standiford

“We are Soroptimist because we are bothered by those things. I believe the world can change when we are bothered enough,” Standiford said during the lunch at Harrah’s Lake Tahoe.

She pointed to the local club developing the Fighting Chance program for schoolchildren after Jaycee Lee Dugard was kidnapped nearly 19 years ago and founding the South Lake Tahoe Women’s Center years ago as evidence the mission is working on the South Shore.

“Think how different your community would be if you weren’t here,” Standiford said.

Remembering the mission of Soroptimist – improving the lives of women and children – is the most important thing to remember, she told the local chapter.

Being open to possibilities and having a willingness to learn new things are traits that have served Standiford well.

She heads up one of the four federations that make up the international organization. Standiford oversees 38,000 members in 19 countries.

Through her post she has traveled to many of those countries as well as ones where Soroptimist is helping empower women – like Rwanda and Sierra Leone.

Standiford said women throughout the world want the same things – economic opportunity, an education for their children, their voice to be heard, security and peace.

“What I can’t figure out is why these dreams are so far out of reach for so many,” Standiford said.