League to Save Lake Tahoe in escrow

The League to Save Lake Tahoe is gearing up to move into a building that it owns.

The environmental group is in escrow on the old Lorraine Bakery at the corner of Highway 50 and Third Street in South Lake Tahoe.



The League to Save Lake Tahoe is about to have new offices. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The League offices are currently on Emerald Bay Road on land that years ago was a marsh.

Neither Executive Director Rochelle Nason nor Program Director Carol Young was available for comment and the person answering the phone said she was not at liberty to discuss the move.

Lake Tahoe ski report, Feb. 5



Wind could be a problem at some resorts this morning. Here is the ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Canada’s ties to Olympics span decades



By USSA

This will be the second Olympic Winter Games, after the 1988 Games in Calgary, to be in Canada, but the country’s historic ties to the event go back much further.

Canada helped usher in the first Olympic Winter Games – at the Alpine resort of Chamonix, France, in 1924 – by joining with Central Europe to persuade the International Olympic Committee to add an International Winter Sports Week to the Games planned for that year.

For the Games in Vancouver (Feb. 12-28), the Olympic torch relay is expected to be the longest to take place in a single country. Thousands of Canadians will participate in carrying the torch from Victoria, BC, through every province and territory of the country. After reaching St. John’s, NL, in the east, the torch will then make its journey back to British Columbia.

More than 80 countries will participate and approximately 5,000 athletes and officials will be involved in the XXI Olympic Winter Games.

At least a million people are expected to travel to Vancouver, a city surrounded by water on three sides with a view of nearby mountains. The main venue for skiing will be Whistler, north of Vancouver.

The number of sports designated for Olympic Winter Games has grown over the years. In addition to those included since 1924 – figure skating, ice hockey, cross country skiing, bobsled, Nordic combined, ski jumping, and speed skating – athletes today compete in Alpine skiing, biathlon, luge, and curling, as well as in the newer disciplines of snowboarding, freestyle skiing, and short-track speed skating.

After making their Olympic debut in Torino, Italy, in 2006, snowboardcross and the team pursuit speed skating will be officially added to the 2010 program, which will also include the debut of skiercross, a race down a technically challenging course resembling a motocross track.

Feds defend wild horse round-up, oil pipeline near Reno

By Frank X. Mullen Jr., Reno Gazette-Journal

In the fight against removing large numbers of wild horses from the northwestern Nevada range, a proposed $3 billion natural gas pipeline is at the front lines, critics of the roundups said.

Activists who want the horses to stay on the range say the Ruby Pipeline project is the “smoking gun” that made federal officials decide to round up 2,500 horses this month from the desert about 100 miles north of Reno. The horses and burros will be sent to corrals and pastures in the Midwest and East.

Federal authorities and the pipeline firm denied the roundups have anything to do with the pipeline plan. Government officials said the horses would have been relocated even without the project because land and water resources can’t sustain large numbers of mustangs.

Read the whole story

EDC food stamp needs, foreclosures, unemployment rise

By Cynthia Hubert, Sacramento Bee

From rustic vineyards to elegant country clubs, the rolling hills of El Dorado County paint a picture of quiet wealth.

But the recession is taking a toll on an area that traditionally has been one of the most privileged in California.

El Dorado County’s unemployment rate was 12.6 percent in December, matching Yolo’s for the highest three-year jump in the Sacramento region. Foreclosures continue to batter the area, with 889 homes lost in the county last year, 150 more than in 2008.

Read the whole story

El Dorado County wines holding their own in recession

By Kathryn Reed

PLEASANT VALLEY – People are imbibing, but it's not all about California.

Argentina, Chile and Australia are cutting into the Golden State's wine sales. Last year was the first time in 16 years that California wine shipments dropped, according to the Bay Area's Gomberg, Fredrikson & Associates.

2009 was a mixed bag for El Dorado County wineries, according to an informal survey taken last weekend.



El Dorado County wineries are surviving the recession. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Teena Hildebrand, who with husband Frank owns Narrow Gate Vineyards, said their sales were about 1.5-2 percent higher in 2009 than in 2008. Narrow Gate is in its fifth year of operation in the Pleasant Valley area.

At nearby Sierra Vista, owner John MacCready said sales were off by 10 to 15 percent in 2009 compared to the previous year.

“They aren’t buying as many cases as they used to,” MacCready said. “A lot of people who came up here worked for the state and the state put people on furloughs. That made a difference in their visits to the foothills.”

In the six years Busby Cellars has been open, 2007 was the best year. Sales dropped in 2008, but came back some in 2009.

“Foot traffic is the same,” owner Elliot Murphy said.

His wife and co-owner Sherri Graham added, “We used to see more full cases sell. People are buying more bottles.”



Sherrie Murphy is selling fewer cases at Busby.

At Latcham Vineyards in Fair Play, sales for the last three years have been consistent.

Owner Margaret Latcham said visits to the tasting room are tracking the same from year-to-year, but said people are watching what they spend.

People are looking for deals, according to winemakers in El Dorado. That matches the trend the more formal survey uncovered. On a statewide level, sales of bottles priced at $20 or more were down between 20 and 30 percent. Wine costing $6 or less increased by 5 percent.

At four El Dorado County wineries visited by *Lake Tahoe News* last weekend, no one was selling wine for $6 or less.

“The consumer trend has been to buy two $20 bottles instead of one $40 bottle of wine, and many El Dorado wines hit that price point,” said Jolaine Collins, spokeswoman for El Dorado Winery Association. “In the end, quality and value trump all.”

Latcham’ wholesale business has picked up, with the owner saying she has a hard time keeping up with Costco’s needs.

Gold Rush Red, Latcham’s red table wine, proves people are looking for deals. It was selling for $7.89 a bottle during last weekend’s Bring Out the Barrel event.

“There’s a huge demand for less expensive wines,” Latcham said.



Margaret Latcham, left, is not having a problem selling wine.

Usually 2,000 cases of Gold Rush Red are bottled a year. That number rose to 7,000 last year.

At Busby, their red table wine called Meyers Ranch, sells for $9.50 a bottle. The owners have noticed people wanting to spend less. About 95 percent of their 2,000 cases are sold at the winery.

Nothing on Sierra Vista's tasting sheet sold for less than $15 a bottle.

Wines at Narrow Gate run $18-$32.

"You don't come here to get a sale wine," Teena Hildebrand said.

She credits paying attention to the whole package, right down to making sure the restroom is clean, as to why people keep frequenting Narrow Gate. She said quality of wine and quality of service are imperative.

Hildebrand goes back to her college days of learning about marketing – price, product, place and promotion. She's added a fifth P – people.

â€œConstantly analyzing the numbers, adding more events, creating gimmicky wines, or planning your next deeply discounted wine promotion simply feeds a roller coaster business plan. Being excellent at the four P's leads to a much more consistent, dependable, "we can sleep at night – business," Hildebrand said. "When you love people, all your financial decisions, marketing efforts, creativity and execution is born out of this value. How many times I have heard how the person behind the tasting bar is the single most important asset to the business. That person needs to reflect the image, values and energy of the winery."

Narrow Gate bottles 26 varietals in 5,000-7,000 cases a year.

But Hildebrand also credits the people who came before her.

"We have benefited much from the trailblazing of our neighbors – like Sierra Vista, who risked and invested everything back

in the ’70s to move here, plant vines, and open a winery. Plus, Holly’s Hill – who did the same in 2002 and invested heavily in their property, winemaking, etc., while reinforcing the family and hospitable atmosphere people are drawn to here,”Hildebrand said. “Then, Miraflores came on the scene in 2006, probably spending as much money as all of us put together to create a high quality winery with excellent wines and a gorgeous facility.”

The Murphys at Busby look forward to the two other wineries that are slated to open near them soon. They believe it will make Grizzly Flat Road a little destination instead of people traveling to Somerset for just their wines.

Sierra Vista’s MacCready is also a proponent of competition and having neighbors. But he is hurting because he’s getting a smaller slice of the consumer pie.

“The number of people coming to El Dorado County has not increased like the number of wineries has,” MacCready said. “Traffic (to Sierra Vista) has decreased in the last three or four years.”

The world keeps turning land into vineyards. California has 480,000 acres of wine grapes, with nearly 2,500 of those acres in El Dorado County. However, Argentina has 510,000 acres of grapes.

Although California produces 90 percent of the wine made in the United States, imports are gaining notoriety. Thirteen million cases were imported in 2009 – more than double from 2007.

Last Tracks wine-ski event returns to Diamond Peak

Diamond Peak ski resort in Incline Village is bringing back its Last Tracks wine event starting Feb. 6

For $29 participants can the last chairlift to the mid-mountain Snowflake Lodge and enjoy wine tasting and appetizers before skiing down a freshly groomed run at sunset.

Last Tracks Schedule

Feb. 6 – Sebastiani

Feb. 13 – White Hall Lane

Feb. 20 – Rodney Strong

Feb. 27 – Ruffino

March 6 – Folie a Deux

March 13 – Clos du Bois

March 20 – Wente

March 27 – Simi

April 3 – Ironstone

April 10 – New Belguim Brewing

For more information or to purchase tickets, call (775) 832.1235.

A sixth day with Dan Thrift on KTHO



The new morning guy at KTHO-FM 96.1/AM-590 can't get a day off. Hear what Dan Thrift is doing now after being a full time photojournalist for years and learn what he thinks about bear hunting. He'll be the guest on Saturday at 10am. Or listen at www.kthoradio.com.

Reno dubbed one of the drunkest cities

By Andrew Del Greco, News 4

While Northern Nevada is no doubt a desirable place to live, a new list was unveiled that ranked Reno in a rather unappealing category.

Reno's done it again. The city has found itself on the top – or should we say the bottom – of another national list. This one comes from a study conducted by Men's Health magazine.

They looked at 100 cities and concluded we are what they call one of the drunkest cities in America.

Read the whole story

Olympic flame to reach Whistler on Friday

By James Keller, Canadian Press

SQUAMISH, British Columbia – One of four First Nations communities that have been given an official role in the Winter Games welcomed the Olympic torch to their traditional territory on Thursday, blessing the "sacred" flame as it entered a region that has been waiting for this moment for nearly a decade.

Hundreds of residents of the Squamish First Nation packed a hall in Stawamus, just south of the town of Squamish, as the brightly burning flame was carried in to the beat of aboriginal drumming.



Skier's Square at Whistler Village will welcome the Olympic Flame on Feb. 5.

"Thank you for blessing this sacred fire that has been shared throughout the world," Laverne Baker, a Squamish elder, told the crowd, during a traditional blessing ceremony.

Read the whole story