Woodward Tahoe instructor a judge at Olympics

By Eddie Pells, AP

KRASNAYA POLYANA, Russia — Phoebe Mills used to flip for Olympic medals. These days, she decides who wins them.

The 1988 U.S. gymnastics champion and Olympic bronze medalist is working in the snowboarding judging booth at the Sochi Games, giving marks in both the halfpipe and slopestyle contests at Rosa Khutor Extreme Park.

“It was sort of a way to remain involved in snowboarding once I stopped coaching and went into law school,” Mills said. “I had no imagination that it would lead to this.”

Gymnastics. Law school. Snowboarding. She was also a top platform diver in college.

Yes, it is a lot to take in, but the Mills family is, to put it mildly, very ambitious and athletic.

Phoebe is one of four world-class athletes among the Mills kids. Her older brother, Nathaniel, is a three-time Olympian in speedskating. Her younger sister, Jessica, was the junior world champion in figure skating in 1989. Brother Lucas was on the U.S. speedskating team for a few years. (Another brother, Whitaker, is a professional opera singer in London.)

Mills, 41, fell into snowboarding after college during a visit to Vail to see Jessica. It was the late 1990s, around the time the sport was introduced to the Olympics.

She returned to Vermont and took it up more seriously and a friend running the school at the Okemo Mountain Resort, snowboarding guru Gordon Robbins, recognized the talent and told her to go all in for the sport.

Mills did and became a teacher, which is still essentially her day job as director of operations for the Woodward Tahoe snowboarding school at Boreal.

A natural shift from gymnastics to snowboarding? Not really.

“I chose it because it was so different, more a lifestyle sport and outside in the environment,” Mills said. “After doing it for a while, I realized that, oh, some things do relate. I saw the connections. But in the end, it’s a pretty different sport.”

Mills got her law degree and practiced environmental law for a about four years before giving that up and heading back to teach on the slopes.

Meanwhile, she kept her hand in judging. She served as the lead judge for a handful of U.S. contests this winter leading to the Olympics.

Now, the ultimate honor – a spot on the six-person Olympic panel.

The slopestyle contest brought some griping from the riders about the judging, which favored more technical tricks over the biggest jumps. Mills knows that drill. She learned early in her gymnastics career to not put all her self-worth in what the judges thought. She advises the riders to take the same attitude, even though it’s her word they’ll be playing down.

“I knew what I was capable of doing, what was a good routine for myself. I’d coach my kids in the same manner,” she said. “But on other side of it, we are really focused on making sure the results are correct and people on the results sheet are in the right order.”

Slow start to ski season impacts visitor numbers

By Danny King, Travel Weekly

Drought conditions in the Western U.S. are chipping away at North American ski-resort demand that had shown initial gains from the combination of a resurgent economy and early-season storms.

Despite the fact that some Colorado resorts late last month received their largest single- and two-day snowfall amounts in more than a decade, well-below-average snowfall at Lake Tahoe and Mammoth Mountain threaten to pull overall numbers down as prospective skiers shift their sights to warmer-weather destinations.

With lift-ticket sales down by as much as a third from last year because of dry conditions, it will be “virtually impossible” for North American resorts to meet the 2012-13 season total of almost 57 million skier days this season, said Ralf Garrison, director of DestiMetrics (formerly MTRiP).

Moreover, 2013-14 activity will be far below the record 61 million North American skier days in 2010-11, when many resorts received record snowfall.

Through Jan. 5, Vail Resorts’ lift-ticket revenue from its eight mountains rose 3.9 percent from a year earlier, as a 7.4 percent increase in Colorado and Utah ski visits more than offset the effect of a 23 percent plunge in visits to its three Lake Tahoe resorts.

Read the whole story

Gun found in trash at South Tahoe Refuse

South Tahoe Refuse workers are used to sorting all sorts of things that come across the conveyor belt. On Monday it was a gun.

“The protocol is it gets turned into our manager immediately and then we call the police department and they come pick it up,” John Marchini, who owns STR, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Marchini did not see this particular handgun on Feb. 11 so he does not know the caliber of it.

South Lake Tahoe police officers were not forthcoming with any information about the gun. This means it is not known if the gun was used in the commission of a crime, if it were stolen, why the owner dumped it or whom it is registered to.

Marchini said guns are not often found on the sorting line. Ammunition is more common.

When something comes along that workers think might have accidentally found its way in the trash – like car keys, jewelry and cell phones – they are put to the side so the person could come claim the item.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

’13 grape crush sets record in California

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

California’s 2013 grape crush hit a record high 4,685,075 tons, up 6.8 percent from the previous record high 2012 crush of 4,387,434 tons, according to new statistics released Monday by the California Department of Food and Agriculture.

The department’s 2013 Preliminary Grape Crush Report said red wine varieties accounted for the largest share, at 2,405,942 tons, up 5 percent from 2012.t from 2012.

Read the whole story

Letter: Dental group supports Bread & Broth

To the community,

Bread & Broth was very fortunate to have the Genasci/Stigers Family Dental Care group sponsor the Adopt A Day of Nourishment on Feb. 3. It was a busy night for the B&B volunteers and enthusiastically assisting them were Lee Anne Stigers, Jon Helman, Alejandra Quirarte, and Lisa Mascitelli.

Thanks to the evening’s generous sponsors, the versatile B&B cooks provided the evening’s dinner guests with a wide variety of tasty food which included Sloppy Joe’s, stuffed green

peppers, veggies, crab salad, fruit salad, crab alfredo and apple salad.

“The food was amazing and delicious,” said Stigers. “The team did a great job.”

According to the B&B volunteers, the Genasci/Stiger’s sponsor crew also did a great job bagging “give-aways”, cheerfully greeting the guests and filling their trays and helping with the dinner’s cleanup.

“Enhancing smiles for a lifetime” is the Genasci/Stigers motto and by hosting the evening’s meal, they also brought smiles to the dinner guests’ faces.

“It’s an eye opener to see how many people are in need in this community”, observed Helman.

By supporting B&B’s weekly Monday evening dinner serving, the Genasci/Stiger’s Family Dental Care group took a positive step to help their fellow community members. B&B would like to salute our evening’s sponsor for their generosity of spirit and financial donation.

Carol Gerard, Bread & Broth

Could water supply be found under the ocean?

By Andrew Alden, KQED-TV

Underground boundaries between land and sea aren’t as stark as they are to us as we stand on the beach. Water knows this. Groundwater everywhere responds slowly to changes above, even

geological changes. In most of the Earth’s crust, water moves around a meter per year. This enormous contrast between surface water and groundwater may be the big fact that hydrologists appreciate more than the rest of us, even geologists, who know a lot about slow things.

Seawater moving inland is a well-known problem for coastal cities. It arises when groundwater is pumped out faster than it can be replenished, and saltwater moves into the space. In the city of Fremont, the Alameda County Water District successfully manages saltwater intrusion in its major water source, the Niles Cone, by effectively building a wall of freshwater along the outer rim of the cone.

The opposite situation, freshwater intrusion, can occur offshore. Fresh groundwater lying above sea level on land would have the pressure needed to push aside the denser, salty water of the ocean once it reached that level. And scientists have known for a long time about freshwater springs that occur offshore. In the 1970s, U.S. government geologists learned that fresh water may underlie the seafloor for a surprising distance offshore, up to 100 kilometers in places.

Read the whole story

No hardware for U.S. men in halfpipe



Elijah Teter, back, coaches Japanese snowboarders Ayumu Hirano, left, and Eiju Hirano, right. In the middle is Ryo Aono. Photo/Provided

The U.S. men missed the podium in the halfpipe on Tuesday.

Ayumu Hirano, the 15-year-old from Japan, who is coached by Elijah Teter, won silver at the Sochi Games with a score of 93.5.

Swiss rider Iouri Podladtchikov won gold with a 94.75. Taking the bronze was Japan's Taku Hiraoka with a 92.25.

Shaun White, who rides for Northstar, was the favorite coming into the Feb. 11 event. He took gold in the previous two Olympics. He fell twice on his first run, but came up with a 90.25 on the second run. That left him in fourth place.

White had pulled of slopestyle earlier in the week to concentrate on halfpipe. The decision was met with mixed reactions by his U.S. Olympic teammates.

Danny Davis of Truckee fell on both runs, finishing 10th. Greg Bretz of Mammoth placed 12th.

Many of the riders – men and women – have been complaining about the halfpipe, calling it bumpy with a flat bottom.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Hit and run driver leaves S. Tahoe teen in road

A 15-year-old South Lake Tahoe teen is at Renown Medical Center in Reno today recovering from injuries sustained the night before after being hit by a vehicle.

The name of the youth has not been released. The extent of his injuries is also not known.

The boy was at the intersection of Third and Washington streets in South Tahoe on Feb. 10 at about 6:45pm when a white or off-white Subaru struck him.

A witness did not see the impact, but saw the boy under the vehicle. The vehicle passed over him. The witness said the youth was bleeding from scrapes and was bruised. He asked the passer-by to drive him home. From there the witness took him to Barton Memorial Hospital.

He was later flown to the Reno hospital. It wasn't until the boy was at Barton that officers were notified of the incident.

The vehicle fled the seen headed east on Washington. A white male was driving the car, according to officers.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Bill would limit power of EPA

By Robin Wilkey, Huffington Post

A new bill introduced by House Republicans would limit the ability of the Environmental Protection Agency to recommend or implement policies.

The bill, dubbed the Secret Science Reform Act, would force the EPA to publicly release its research on a topic before issuing a policy recommendation, and require that the research be "reproducible." Supporters claim the bill will increase transparency in public policy, while opponents have accused the bill's authors of trying to "keep the EPA from doing its job."

"Virtually every regulation proposed by the Obama administration has been justified by nontransparent data and unverifiable claims," Rep. Lamar Smith, R-Texas, who sponsored the bill, said in a statement. "The American people foot the bill for EPA's costly regulations, and they have a right to see the underlying science. The Secret Science Reform Act of 2014, which I sponsored, prohibits EPA from using secret science to justify new regulations."

Read the whole story

SLT council can't decide how to allocate surplus



Jim Marino with the South Lake Tahoe Public Works Department goes over the dilapidated conditions of city infrastructure at the Feb. 10 workshop. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A workshop Monday was designed for the South Lake Tahoe City Council to figure out how to allocate any surpluses so policy is in place before the money is in hand and it doesn't get wasted. The council fell short of that goal.

City Manager Nancy Kerry said part of the goal was "to be more strategic" so the council, and therefore staff, would have a policy to follow instead of being reactive.

While some council members talked about divvying up the money by percentages, no consensus was found to create such a policy. Although hotel tax dollars are not as robust in January and February because of the lack of snow, there is still the possibility that at the March mid-year budget session a half million dollars will need to be allocated.

Instead, the council adopted a community investment policy that says, "We will focus on the built environment based on critical need and prioritize investment in geographic locations that strive to achieve the greatest return on investment."

A line item will be added to the budget for the community investment. But there was no true definition of the investment.

South Lake Tahoe has plenty of things it needs to spend money on, but the money to do so is lacking. However, revenues are on the upswing, so such a policy is needed so the money is not frittered away.

Only two members of the public attended the 2½-hour meeting. Neither spoke.

While these five electeds heard a presentation from public works about the need for roads, facilities and fleet investments, any council could redefine community investment. Even these five, while sympathetic to the needs, did not commit to their being the focus of any new money.



The South Lake Tahoe City Council members, from left, Tom Davis, JoAnn Conner, Angela Swanson, Hal Cole and Brooke Laine, are unable to decide Feb. 10 how to deal with potential budget surpluses.

Jim Marino, No. 2 guy at public works, said if the 256 lane miles of city roads had been maintained properly, the weather the past few days would not have created the number of potholes that it has.

He told the council more than 47 percent of the roads in the city have about five years of life left to them. It would cost $119,522,327 to replace current roads. The deferred maintenance backlog is at more than $26 million. If no more money is put toward roads, the deferred maintenance bill grows by $3 million annually.

To fix the roads, replace aging vehicles and bring facilities into the 21st century, the city would need to spend about $300 million, Marino said.

While the city has seen $80.5 million worth of capital improvements this century, 71 percent of those dollars came from state or federal sources.

“Those are new facilities we need to maintain,” Marino pointed out. But the maintenance fund has not increased. That is why the deferred maintenance bill keeps increasing.

There was agreement that recreation should be its own category when it comes to “extra” investing.

The other thing the council agreed to on Feb. 10 was for an analysis of the reserve policy to be conducted.

Consultant Mike Levison, who has a history of helping the city with strategic planning, said most cities have a reserve of about 18 percent. South Lake Tahoe, more than 10 years ago, set the policy to have a 25 percent reserve. This was after not having any extra in the kitty.

Excess reserves – money beyond the 25 percent – have been used in the lean years of late. But the 25 percent has not been tapped. To alter the 25 percent rule would take four out the five council members.

In other action:

• There was talk of Tahoe Olympians. Sierra-at-Tahoe is taking the lead in figuring out how best to celebrate the

accomplishments of its three Olympians – Jamie Anderson, Hannah Teter and Maddie Bowman. All are residents of Meyers. South Lake Tahoe and Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority have offered to help. What the community event will be has not been determined. Sierra is not allowed to advertise anything involving its athletes until the Games are over.

• El Dorado County Elections Department has ruled that if the council at its regular meeting Feb. 18 decides to put a paid parking question to voters, that it can be on the June ballot.