Lake Tahoe ski report, Jan. 6



Clouds are filling up the sky and that white stuff is in the forecast. Here is today’s ski report from Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

Lakes near Tahoe to be inspected for mussels

By Jeff Delong, Reno Gazette-Journal

The hunt for invading mussels that could pose an ecological disaster for the region will extend beyond Lake Tahoe to other threatened lakes and reservoirs.

Donner and Independence lakes and Boca, Stampede and Prosser Creek reservoirs will be searched for the possible presence of quagga or zebra mussels. Boats launching into these water bodies could soon be inspected to ensure mussels are not attached to their hulls.

Read the whole story

Decision on Bijou post office

expected in 3 weeks



By Kathryn Reed

South Lake Tahoe post office officials expect to know by the end of the month if the Bijou facility will be closed.

Postmaster Toni Passot told *Lake Tahoe News* on Jan. 5 that no decision has been made yet.

Some of the confusion with the more than 900 people who rent a box at the facility may be that they cannot renew their box for more than six months. Passot said based on how the U.S. Postal Service issues refunds, it's better for patrons not to rent longer than six moths at Bijou right now.

The lease on the building expires in the summer. If the decision is made to close the office, summer is when it would likely occur. The reason to close would be to save money.

"We can accommodate them in other facilities," Passot said. The main post office is one mile away, plus there is an office in Meyers and one at the Y. Or people could get mail delivered to their house.

In the last several years, the Tahoe Keys, Stateline area and Black Bart neighborhood locations that just had boxes, and no office per se, have also closed.

"We had as many boxes as the city of Reno at one time," Passot said. "But we didn't have home mail delivery then."

There was a time when there was a waiting list for a post office box in South Lake Tahoe. Without home delivery, people were on General Delivery – meaning they had to get their mail from a clerk during business hours.

Abstract art exhibit at LTCC starts Jan. 9



South Shore artist and poet Yasmin Sayyed will display her abstract paintings in Lake Tahoe Community Collegeâ€™s Foyer Gallery starting Jan. 9.

Born in New York of Cape Verdean and Caribbean ancestry, much of her professional life has been spent as an educator, researcher and psycho-educational therapist. Sayyed has had a lifelong passion for making art in the service of spirituality, peace, and truth-telling inform these colorful and magical paintings.

The exhibit runs through March 20.

An Artistsâ€™ Reception is Jan. 14, 6-8pm.

Number of homes sold in Tahoe on the upswing



By Kathryn Reed

More houses were sold in Lake Tahoe in 2009 than in 2008, but the prices kept falling.

Foreclosure listings are still happening on a regular basis as people struggle to make ends meet in this economically depressed region.

According to Chase International, sales were up 22 percent throughout the basin. It breaks down to increases of 22 percent on the South Shore, 38 percent in Tahoe City, 17 percent on the East Shore, and 4 percent in Incline. In Truckee, sales jumped 23 percent.

â€œWe are definitely seeing signs that home prices may be reaching the bottom. Some of the home prices we saw in 2009 were equivalent to prices a decade ago, and buyers have taken advantage of these discounts by snapping up some of these great properties, thereby limiting available inventory,â€ Sue Lowe, Chase vice president, said in a press release. â€œNow that the word is out about the amazing values to be had in the Reno-Tahoe area, we anticipate pricing will level off as even more buyers enter the market.â€

Lowe is always optimistic with her prepared statements.

The 2009, Reno single-family home sales were up 41 percent.

Condominium sales are all over the board: East Shore up 69 percent, Tahoe City up 47 percent, Incline Village up 8 percent, South Shore down 27 percent., Reno up 59 percent.

Charter to sell billions in

stock

Sacramento Business Journal

Charter Communications Inc., which emerged from bankruptcy in November, plans to sell nearly 78 million shares of stock worth up to $2.7 billion.

The proposed maximum offering price is $34.50 a share, according to a filing Thursday with the Securities and Exchange Commission.

Read the whole story

New headquarters for Sierra Wildlife Rescue

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

Sierra Wildlife Rescue, an El Dorado County-based volunteer group that rescues and rehabilitates injured and orphaned wild animals, begins the new year in new quarters.

With its 2010 class offerings for current and prospective volunteers scheduled to begin Jan. 14, volunteers will hold a work day Jan. 9 to put finishing touches on the new center at 3030 Newtown Road, on Placerville’s eastern edge, said volunteer Barbara Barker.

Read the whole story

BlueGo is seeing red; more cuts needed



By Kathryn Reed

A $211,000 shortfall is requiring BlueGo to tweak bus routes in South Lake Tahoe – again.

It seems like every few months officials from the South Shore bus agency come before the South Lake Tahoe City Council with either proposed route changes or fare increases.

On Tuesday there will be a public hearing on the proposed suspension of routes, including doubling the wait time for the main route on Highway 50 through the center of town. The BlueGo plan is scheduled to begin Jan. 13 and last until June 30 – the end of the fiscal year.

When the agency has budget hearings next spring, reintroducing the suspended routes is likely to be one of the topics.

South Tahoe Area Transit Authority (STATA) board members first must approve the changes at their meeting Friday at 1pm at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency office in Stateline.

All but one affected route is in South Lake Tahoe. The lone Nevada route involves Whittell High School-Zephyr Cove on the weekends.

The route restructure should bring a savings of $183,000. The

entire operating budget is being looked at to see where other dollars can be saved.

“If we did any further cuts to the transit system, we would have impacted people’s ability to get around,” explained John Andoh, BlueGo administrator.

Andoh and the agency’s accountant are the only two paid employees. BlueGo contracts with MV Transit to operate the buses.

The city, El Dorado and Douglas counties, the Stateline casinos, Ridge Tahoe and Heavenly Mountain Resort are some of the entities that make up STATA and pay into the bus service.

Funding comes from a variety of sources, including both states, the feds, grants and fares. But the money that one state ponies up cannot be used in the other state. This is why California is feeling the brunt of the route suspensions.

“Revenue is not coming in as projected,”Andoh said. California uses property taxes to fund transit agencies, and those taxes are down significantly from years past.

The entire BlueGo budget is $4 million a year.

Changing the operation



"What is a BlueGo?" tourists ask. A picture of a bus on the

signs would answer that question.

It wasn’t until a couple years ago that BlueGo had an administrator or was operated as a coordinated transit agency.

The operating agreement from 1995 is still in affect. It is going to be reviewed Jan. 8 as well as the bylaws. Changes should be finalized in the coming months.

STATA members each get a vote. But in 1995 Harrah’s Lake Tahoe and Harveys had different owners, so they still each have votes when in fact they are now one company.

On the flipside, when MontBleu and Horizon joined they were owned by the same company but are now under separate ownership.

“Friday’s discussion is how do they add more members for additional revenue into the system,” said Rick Angelocci, South Lake Tahoe assistant city manager and the city’s alternate representative to the board.

(South Tahoe’s rep and Mayor Kathay Lovell did not return a phone call. Neither did Nancy McDermid, Douglas County commissioner and chairwoman of STATA.)

About a year ago, Ridge Tahoe at the top of Kingsbury Grade was brought in to STATA. The time-share resort donated its vehicles and put up some cash.

Other lodging properties have expressed interest in joining as well. In the past, Sierra-at-Tahoe has been talked about as a potential member.

Looking forward and back

To attract bus riders, the board realizes it must make the system approachable. One definition of that is comfort.

“The city is getting new buses in a couple weeks. They have extra heaters, extra CNG tanks so they can go farther without refueling, wider seats that are a little more cushiony and satellite radio,” Angelocci said.

He said these are things that will attract the “choice riders” – those who choose to ride BlueGo as opposed to those who have to ride the bus to get to their destination.



Most bus stops on the South Shore are exposed to the elements. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Another thing that will change in the next year is installing bus shelters so people don’t have to keep sitting or standing in the cold. So many of the bus stops throughout the South Shore are just a bench. And because sidewalks are so haphazard and seldom shoveled even getting to the bench can be dangerous this time of year.

The City Council last fall allocated $30,000 from its air quality mitigation funds to help fund the shelters. Grants are also being sought to help pay for shelters.

A former elected official said the city bought shelters in the past that were stored at Lake Tahoe Airport, but were never used. It’s unknown what happened to them.

Another issue for South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 12 will be deciding in closed session whether to file a lawsuit against ATM, the transit operator before MV. The lawsuit ATM filed against the city in federal court for breach of contract was thrown out last year.

BlueGo is in debt about $1 million to MV. Officials say this has to do with startup costs because the city's bus garage was in such disrepair when Area Transit Management abruptly quit operating days before it was scheduled to in December 2008.

It used to be that TRPA would float BlueGo the money when it came up short on cash, then have transit grants pay TPRA back. That was until two years ago when BlueGo was told it had to be a standalone entity without those crutches.

Angelocci said it could take four years to pay off that debt, unless the city tries to recover those costs in court.

MV had to fix buses, cleanup the garage and buy parts. Employees had to be hired and trained.

But no one in the city lost his or her job for not overseeing the ATM operation and allowing it to become what it became.

Multiple safety infractions led the city to want to get rid of ATM. Andrew Morris ran ATM after buying the company from Ken Daley in November 2006.

Daley formed ATM in 1985 and began running STAGE, the predecessor to BlueGo.

He was at odds with the city several times in those 21years – sometimes regarding money. (Daley is now a real estate agent and will be installed as treasurer of the South Tahoe Association of Realtors on Friday.)

Daley was at the helm in June 2002 when a $3.6 million deal was signed to bring what was touted as a state of the art bus system to the South Shore. Sixty-five telephones and 31 kiosks

were supposed to be installed so passengers could find out when the next bus would arrive.

It never worked. They were pulled offline within months and never returned to service. It’s unknown what happened to the kiosks and the technology.

Tahoe area AT&T workers to lose jobs

KCRA-TV

SACRAMENTO – AT&T is planning to lay off 525 technicians statewide by the end of March.

Local union president Joel Nielsen said those layoffs would affect about 54 or 90 technicians that work out of Placerville and serve Auburn, Folsom, Placerville, Sacramento, Truckee, and the Lake Tahoe region.

Read the whole story

Tahoe snowboarders in contention in Mammoth

By Lindsey Sine, USSA

MAMMOTH MOUNTAIN – No, it’s not dÃ©jÃ vu. Olympic gold medalists Kelly Clark (Mt. Snow, VT) and Shaun White

(Carlsbad, CA) are just so consistent that for the second Sprint U.S. Snowboarding Grand Prix in a row, they have qualified first and will lead Wednesday's finals.

Under the sunny California sky, Clark was once again the queen of the halfpipe, landing frontside air, back 5, front 7 tail, cab 7, indie front 5, indie backside air, for her top of the pack status.

Backing Clark up in the standings was fellow gold medalist Hannah Teter (South Lake Tahoe, CA). Teter noted her overall excitement to get qualifications out of the way after crashing in qualis at the Copper Grand Prix and not competing. And rounding things out for the dream team of women's halfpipe was Gretchen Bleiler (Aspen, CO).

According to Clark, landing a qualifying run sets her up perfectly for finals.

"It's always encouraging being able to make it to the finals having done so well. Being able to be consistent in the qualifiers is a great way to head in to the finals," Clark said. "I'm looking for some consistent results, and it should set me up for a fun week."

Clark was also stoked to be at Mammoth Mountain, where her friends are able to see her competing.

"It's great being at Mammoth. A lot of my friends are able to come up and support me and I have a high value for that, so I really enjoy it," said Clark.

In the ultra-competitive men's halfpipe field, athletes again double corked their way to the tops of heats, led by none other than the great White whose second run of the day, a frontside air, backside 540, frontside double cork 10, cab double cork 10, frontside 7, cab 10, was the top of the charts for the men.

But the innovative trick didn’t stop with White’s board as Greg Bretz (Mammoth Lakes, CA) showed some love for the home crowd, finishing first in his heat and second overall for the day with an air, back 9, front 10, cab 10, front double cork 10.

For Bretz, the run was a step forward in what he hopes will be a level of consistency for him.

“It feels good. I’m trying to work on my consistency. Louie [Vito, Sandy, UT] and Shaun are two of the most consistent guys in our sport and I can’t watch them win anymore,” Bretz said. “I’m just going to try to come from behind and blind them. I’m stoked to be at home shredding. I’m just doing my thing and having fun.”

Canada’s Jeff Bachelor followed Bretz in third and Vito finished fourth.

The Sprint U.S. Snowboarding Grand Prix continues Wednesday with men’s and women’s halfpipe finals at noon, the second of five Olympic qualifiers. While the Olympic Team will not be named until after the final event Jan. 23, White and Clark will virtually assured themselves a spot if they pick up a second win.

Mammoth Mountain, Jan. 5, Halfpipe Qualifiers

Men

1. Shaun White, Carlsbad, CA, 47.10

2. Greg Bretz, Mammoth Lakes, CA, 45.90

3. Jeff Batchelor, Canada, 43.80

4. Louie Vito, Sandy, UT, 43.40

5. Danny Davis, Detroit, MI, 43.30

6. Elijah Teter, South Lake Tahoe, CA, 43.00

7. Broc Waring, Edwards, CO, 42.20

8. Justin Lameroux, Canada, 41.30

9. JJ Thomas, Golden, CO, 41.20

10. Jack Mitrani, Mammoth, CA, 40.70

11. Steve Fisher, Breckenridge, CO, 39.70

12. Matt Ladley, Steamboat Springs, CO, 39.70

13. Scotty Lago, Seabrook, NH, 39.60

14. Brennen Swanson, Stillwater, MN, 39.00

15. Andy Finch, Truckee, CA, 39.00

16. Mathieu Crepel, France, 38.90

Women

1. Kelly Clark, Mt. Snow, VT, 46.50

2. Hannah Teter, Belmont, VT, 43.90

3. Gretchen Bleiler, Aspen, CO, 43.10

4. Ellery Hollingsworth, Stratton, VT, 42.40

5. Maddy Schaffrick, Steamboat Springs, CO, 41.90

6. Elena Hight, South Lake Tahoe, CA, 40.50

7. Clair Bidez, Minturn, CO, 39.90

8. Holly Crawford, Australia, 39.00