Skilled nursing center open after Norovirus outbreak

By Kathryn Reed

Residents at Barton Memorial Hospital's Skilled Nursing Facility were able to spend Christmas with family and friends. This is news because the center had been closed to visitors for about a week because of the Norovirus.

The South Lake Tahoe facility with more than 40 beds reopened on Christmas Eve.

"It was stressful for everybody," hospital spokeswoman Denise Sloan said. "They didn't have any visitors for at least a week."

The angel tree had to be moved outside of the facility so people could come by to pick a name of a resident to buy a Christmas gift for. Residents opened their gifts after lunch Christmas Day.

Norovirus is common this time of year among facilities with contained populations – like a skilled nursing center, jail or cruise ship. The virus is a gastrointestinal illness.

It was January 2007 that this skilled nursing facility was last on lockdown because of the Norovirus.

Facilities try to keep the general public out because the virus can be easily transmitted. At the Barton center all staff members were wearing masks, gloves, paper gowns and

booties so they wouldn’t spread the virus from one resident to the next.

The virus typically includes diarrhea, vomiting and stomach cramping. Additional symptoms can include low-grade fever, chills and headache. No specific treatment is available. People usually recover in three days or less.

Lake Tahoe ski report, Dec. 26



Storm clouds are moving into the Lake Tahoe area. Read today’s ski report here. It’s courtesy of Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

European ski rental firm moves into Tahoe

Skiset has opened four stores in South Lake Tahoe. The France-based company expanded to North America this year.

The company plans to open stores in Truckee, Tahoe City, Kings Beach, Incline Village and Squaw.

“Skiset has unrivaled brand recognition in Europe. Skiers and riders know that they will receive quality equipment, value for money and great customer service. We only partner with ski

shops in North America which operate to the same standards," Tony Lyle, vice president of Skiset, emailed *Lake Tahoe News*. "In the current economic climate skiers can rent the latest and greatest equipment rather than purchase at a much higher cost. Also, they can eliminate excess baggage fees imposed by most airlines for ski carriage. It's a good time for us to expand and give customers the service, value and quality they expect and deserve."

Heavenly almost lives up to its name

By Kathryn Reed

Friendly – that is the word to sum up Heavenly Mountain Resort.

This hasn't always been the case for this Lake Tahoe resort that straddles California and Nevada. Less flattering words were often associated with the resort in the past and still linger with those who don't call this their home mountain.



Done with their work, reindeer take to the slopes

at Heavenly on
Christmas Day.
Photo/Kathryn
Reed

As an extremely infrequent skier at the South Shore resort, I was told by season passholders this friendliness wasn't just Christmas cheer being dispersed – it's the norm.

When Vail Resorts bought Heavenly in March 2002, one goal was to work on guest services. From the lifties to the food service workers to security to people dealing with less than patient media – everyone was great on Christmas Day.

Skiing Christmas Day is a present unto itself – usually it's less crowded. For two locals who got there at 8:30am, they had the mountain to themselves.

Cathy Donovan of Los Gatos was with her three sons – ages 24, 22 and 14 – taking in some runs.

"No one believes in Santa. Christmas is one of the less crowded days of this week," Donovan, a 1977 South Tahoe High grad, said of why she was on the slopes.

The Zarenba family has skied at Killington and Mammoth, with this being their first trip to Tahoe. Living outside of London means they don't have the luxury of driving up to Tahoe every weekend.

Dad Stefan, 7-year-old Jay and 15-year-old Chelsea all said Heavenly was better than the other U.S. resorts they've been to.

"There is more night life, shops, skiing – the whole town is better," Stefan Zarenba said.

He also commented on the friendliness of the resort and how it's better organized than other places he's been to.

Being Jewish meant Beth Gelles didn’t have to worry about what her family thought of skiing on Christmas Day – just another day on the calendar for them.

“With the economy, we didn’t take a big trip this year,” said Gelles, who lives in San Mateo. Deer Valley is usually where she and her husband and their children, ages 10, 8 and 4, like to ski.

Christmas was their third day of being on the slopes at Heavenly â€“ and the least crowded.

“The views are exceptional,” Gelles said.

Heavenly has the best views of Lake Tahoe. Homewood, on the West Shore, makes you feel like you’re descending into the icy water, but Heavenly has more expansive views than any Tahoe resort.

The calm water on this blue bird day was almost inviting – well, maybe to be on the paddle-wheelers that plied the waters in the distance.

It was a bit disconcerting, though, to read the resort’s website about what’s open – “We couldn’t ask for any more this Christmas than being 100% open” – and finding this to not be the case. The same posting was up hours after the resort was closed for the day.

The six of us were about to go down Canyon. Nope. Closed. Snowmaking in progress. Yes, the website says as much, but after reading the home page about 100 percent being open, why would one venture deeper into the site?

A bit more snowmaking (or Mother Nature) could be used on some of the trails. And the resort could improve marking the rocks and other obstacles.

Don’t even get me started on the $10 bland veggie burrito at East Peak Lodge, the $9 beer or small hot cocoa for more than

$3. If the resort could spread the expertise in hospitality to quality of food and fair pricing, it would make for a more positive skiing experience.

Amanda Olson in the California Bar gets the employee of the day award for her exceptional service and friendliness. Maybe it has something to do with her hometown being Paradise.

One touch that was new since I was last at Heavenly is pulling down the security bar on the Canyon chair and finding a map of the resort. That sure beats taking off gloves and fiddling with a paper map, especially had it been snowing.

But when you have three women skiing together, it did seem a bit sexist for the advertisement for private lessons to say something like start the day as Bob, Bill and Walter and finish it as Hans, Franz and Werner. Why not start the day as Kae, Sue and Brenda and finish it as Hannah, Lindsey and Picabo?

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Extreme outdoor websites merge

Rider-Exchange LLC of Incline Village completed its acquisition of REELcomp Inc. this week.

REELcomp provides a rich consumer experience for online users in snowboard, skate and surf communities with a new ski community, ladies competitions and marketplace planned for early 2010. The combined force of REELcomp and Rider-Exchange strengthens the companyâ€™s ability to provide a premier

destination to upload original footage, compete in online competitions and watch live webcasts of popular extreme sports events, according to a press release.

â€œWe will keep the brand and image that REELcomp has established in the industry, but the underlying philosophy will slightly change," Bob Witty, CEO and co-founder, said in a press release. â€œRider-Exchange plans to release a cutting-edge social network with instant messaging, mobile applications and group chat in mid-2010.â€

Tresten Sweigard, Rider-Exchange founder said, "The other key point for us is to not look like every other extreme sports website. I grew up snowboarding in Lake Tahoe and the people and the culture are so important to me. Rider-Exchange will focus on the youth and the culture of these sports we love so much. Riders, photographers, videographers, teams, artists, musicians will all be featured, basically, anything that touches our lifestyle. We are an Internet platform not a website, a platform that showcases the talent that creates our culture.â€

Cops out in force New Year's Eve

By David Stevenson

New Year's Eve is nearly here. Every year, thousands of revelers crowd the casino corridor in celebration. There is actually no sanctioned event of any kind related to New Year's Eve by the city of South Lake Tahoe or by Douglas County.

You will see a large law enforcement presence on both sides of

the state line because of our efforts to manage safety issues involved with such a large crowd. We would like our guests to remain aware of a few things in order to help us make this a safe and enjoyable evening for everyone:

1. No glass or other hard beverage containers are permitted in the state line corridor on New Yearâ€™s Eve; regardless of whether or not they contain alcohol. Cans, bottles and similar hard containers are prohibited. Any violation of this ordinance will be strictly enforced on both sides of the state line as a misdemeanor criminal offense.

2. If you are under 18 and plan to be out for the New Yearâ€™s Eve celebration, please be with your parents or other responsible adult. The South Lake Tahoe curfew is 10pm,every night, including New Yearâ€™s Eve. (SLT City Ordinance 18-3)

3. Please, no loitering or remaining on public or private property once you have been asked to leave. (SLT City ordinances 18-12.1, 18-12 & section 602 Ca. Penal Code).

4. Disorderly Conduct, Public Intoxication, is a misdemeanor criminal offense (647(f) Ca. penal code).

5. Please place all trash in the appropriate containers (SLT City Ordinance 23-26)

6. Possession of opened alcoholic beverages in public, or in vehicles, is a misdemeanor. (SLT City ordinance 18-9)

7. Contributing to the delinquency of a minor is a misdemeanor offense (272 Ca. penal code)

8. Offensive noises, voices, or music, which can be heard 50 feet from a building (or 10 feet from a vehicle) is prohibited, and may be prosecuted as misdemeanor crimes. (SLT City ordinance 18-10)

9. Please keep your party orderly, whether at the hotel or at your residence, so it does not disturb your neighbors (415(2)

Ca. penal code).

10. Fireworks of any nature are illegal. Please do not bring these to the New Yearâ€™s Eve celebration in the state line corridor (SLT City ordinance 12-31A).

11. The lawful age to possess alcohol in California, open or not, is 21. (25662 Ca. B&P code)

The South Lake Tahoe Police Department understands everyone wants to enjoy themselves. Please help us maintain a safe and healthy environment for everyone. Thank you for your assistance, and have a happy New Year.

David Stevenson is a lieutenant with the South Lake Tahoe Police Department.

Striking foodie gold

By Keven Ann Willey, Dallas Morning News

MURPHYS -â€“ It’s not as well known as Napa or Sonoma, but the Mother Lode region of Northern California along the western side of the Sierra Nevada is just as rich in scenery, food and wine.

The natural beauty of this area stretching from Lake Tahoe south to Yosemite National Park is unsurpassed. And there are accommodations of all types, from comfortable campsites and budget hotels to quaint B&Bs and splashy resorts.

Read the whole story

Lake Tahoe ski report, Dec. 25



Don’t be surprised if you see Santa out there day. Thank him for delivering all that white stuff to the slopes. Here is the ski report for the day brought to you by Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe.

‘Grandma got run over by a reindeer’ has roots in Tahoe

By Michael E. Young, Dallas Morning News

It arrived 30 years ago, a rebellious little ditty that became the ultimate anti-Christmas carol by killing off an eggnog-loving Grandma in the very first line.

But over those three decades, “Grandma Got Run Over by a Reindeer” has managed to become something of a holiday classic. Songwriter Randy Brooks estimates that 40 million copies have been sold in various guises, from the earliest version on 45-rpm vinyl to today’s singing ornaments and plush toys and ring tone downloads.

Read the whole story

Coast Starlight – holiday travel at its best

By Lisa Huard

Have you taken a train lately?

Whether youâ€™re close to the Los Angeles or Sacramento areas and you want to get to the 2010 Winter Olympics in Vancouver, consider taking Amtrakâ€™s Coast Starlight to at least Seattle. You can easily arrange for other transportation to Vancouver from there.

This holiday season we decided to do something different to get to family. We decided to take the train instead of driving from South Lake Tahoe. Itâ€™s just one of those things we say we want to do and for some reason we just keep jumping in the car or â€œhurry to waitâ€ to get on a plane.



Paul and Lisa Huard of South Lake Tahoe ride the rails to their holiday destination.

The train mentality is different altogether. At the Sacramento Station we arrived with our luggage in tow and headed for Train 14 southbound for Los Angeles on Track 3. We were taking the SuperLiner Sleeping Car on the Coast Starlight, one of Amtrakâ€™s premier trains that offer services and features exclusive to this train.

My train experience has been limited. I have taken the train from Anaheim to San Diego, from Oxnard to San Diego and again on a brief excursion in Alaska as part of a cruise. Each time was pleasant but as a traveler on coach, I simply had a seat. This was different.

On the platform we were greeted by the carâ€™s conductor, Jaime; a nice man who would be taking care of us on our journey. We had arranged to get a â€œroometteâ€ which was a small but private room with two reclining type chairs that face each other. The space is very comfortable and has amenities such as pillows, temperature control, lights, a small tray table in the center, an electrical outlet, and music. Itâ€™s designed that two people can comfortably sleep should you decide to. The two opposing chairs fold toward each other and make into a bed. There is also an upper berth that opens down from the ceiling. The more flexible traveler can take the top bunk.

Better than expected

What did I expect in taking the train? The sounds of the train rolling down the track, the sway of the car as it barrels past the stagnate traffic as the rails parallel freeways through towns on the way to the coast, a nine-hour drive by car taking 12 by train, the graffiti of a city on walls in the industrial areas of towns. As the â€œdriverâ€ for more of our trips (control issues) I was looking forward to being able to take naps whenever I wanted. The problem was that I still found myself wanting to see everything. I expected to need to occupy time with a book Iâ€™ve been meaning to read and perhaps

playing Cribbage for hours just to pass the time.

What was a great surprise? Incredible, personal service of a conductor (and other staff) who gave us a tour of the different types of sleeper rooms before others arrived. The offer was the fresh fruit and Champagne, juice, and coffee on our arrival. The holiday decorated Parlour Car where you could sit in comfortable surroundings and enjoy the view out the windows while having a drink, some food, or playing cards. The Dining Car where you choose from a nice menu for your breakfast, lunch, and dinner and merely sign for it as itâ€™s included in your roomette ticket.

The sounds a train makes are pleasing; there really is a clickety-clack in amongst the vibrations of the large windows for your viewing pleasure. Itâ€™s also much more pleasing for the train you are on to be the one making the sound of the horn as you pass by any intersection where a car could be. I used to live in Anaheim, one mile west of Disneyland. The train tracks ran close to my home and honestly, the sound of the train wasnâ€™t as romantic when it rattled your house.

The sounds are reminiscent of the candy advertisement from a bit back, â€œChoo-choo-choo-choo, choo-choo-choo-choo, Good and Plenty, Good and Plenty.â€

Jaime came back to familiarize us a bit more with the train. He told us the history and uniqueness of the Pacific Parlour Car. It is their â€œsignatureâ€ lounge car, exclusive to the Coast Starlight and is a unique and luxuriously upgraded piece of historic equipment and is available to sleeping car passengers. In fact, it is one of the last five cars left from the Santa Feâ€™s famed train of the 1950s, the El Capitan.

Top notch amenities

For our journey I had packed a great picnic complete with wine, cheese, crackers and fruit. The ticket had said meals were included, but I thought that would mean something wrapped

in plastic. Boy was I wrong.

Beyond the Parlour Car is the Dining Car where we joined another couple for breakfast. Unless youâ€™re a recluse in your roomette you will meet all sorts of folks. Here Cora presented us with a cup of nicely brewed coffee and a menu to make a selection from. Since the train is moving there are two ways in which they will serve eggs; scrambled and as an omelet. Cora explained that way they would always come out right for the passenger.

Breakfast fare included choices in eggs, breakfast meats, breads, French toast, yogurt, fruits, and oatmeal. Lunch selections were Caesar salad, burgers, vegetarian burgers, and penne pasta. Dinner boasts roasted herb chicken, a seafood selection, and marinated steak. Of course there are incredible desserts such as Ciao Bella Sicilian lemon sorbet, cheesecake, fruit, and nut desserts selections. And yes, for those who just canâ€™t live without their espresso, cafÃ© latte, cappuccino or mocha, they have those too.



Mel brings wine and cheese to passengers headed to Southern California. Photo/Lisa Huard

The food was good and so was the company we shared a table with. One couple was from Vancouver, British Columbia. They caught this leg of their trip in Seattle and were headed to San Diego. They are a couple who have traveled the world many times over on all sorts of transportation and are thoroughly enjoying their trip on this train. They have often driven from Canada to San Diego and to Scottsdale by car. We have too. It was interesting that all four of us continued to look at the trainâ€™s map information to figure out where we were even though we were so familiar. When youâ€™re on the train, you get a view that you canâ€™t get anywhere else.

The trainâ€™s hallway is narrow. In fact it might be a great way to travel if you are single and want to meet someone. You dine with other folks as they fill up the four tops and unless you back up to the nearest connecting hallway, you literally are up close and personal to someone crossing your path. Since you can see the people coming, you get to decide if you really want to â€œmeetâ€ them or not.

The other intriguing thing about a train is that it is literally pieces of equipment hooked together. Those junctures of metal were most challenging for me. Looking forward you can see that one car is moving in opposition from side to side from the other. You quickly press on a panel to open the door. Then you tell yourself to move forward over the connected area and aim to hit the panel of the second door. If successful, youâ€™ll find yourself closer to the Dining Car. Kids love this part. Adults and those using canes; not so much.

The restrooms are adequate, a bit larger in length than that on a plane, but certainly not in width. In fact if youâ€™re 5-foot-7 with a 31-inch inseam, your knees will be hitting the toilet paper holder. The restroom is not someplace you would want to spend a lot of time in and like all other travel, be sure to wear your shoes. Itâ€™s moving, as you know.

My girlfriend who is a flight attendant is aghast at the many

people who will go barefoot or in their socks to the restroom on a plane. Included on the Sleeper Car are showers. You can use the cute little bag of shower amenities that they provide you in your roomette. And if you need more, just ask.

After our breakfast we decided to go back to our roomette since it was light out and we could see where we were going. Over the PA system came a voice telling us that the CafÃ©â€™ Car was now open. It sits below the Parlour Car and provides sandwiches, drinks, and snacks. We started to laugh as it reminded us of a cruise where if you plan it right, you could eat the entire way.

Aside from rolling down the tracks, the train has a schedule of eating. In fact if you wanted to, you could find yourself doing nothing but eating the entire time. The Starlight is on its second day since it originated in Seattle and is on its way to Los Angeles. Today, the Parlour Car opened at 7am and the Dining Car began its breakfast service at 6:30am. Seating was open and no reservations for breakfast were required. Lunch service begins at noon with a last seating at 1:45on and does require reservations. Cora will be traveling the Sleeper Car to take everyoneâ€™s requests for seating. No need to track her down.

We selected a 12:30 seating because at 3:20 there is a Wine and Cheese Tasting Event where for only $5 and a proper ID you can entertain your gastronomic palate with four wines and three cheeses from places that are actually produced along the route of this fantastic train. The wine selection included treats from Santa Barbara County, Pinnacles Ranches in Monterey County, and the Paso Robles area. From Washington state wines from the Columbia and Yakima Valleys can please your taste buds. On the southbound train, this portion of your journey occurs around sunset. The dome ceiling of the historic Parlour Car is even more special as you sit, learn, and enjoy these treats.

Life on the rails

Jaime stopped by again to check on how we were doing. He brought us a beautiful Origami bird in blue and red that he made. He is an intelligent, artistic, and thoughtful person. He told us he makes Origami for all of his passengers. He also color codes them to help children or older folks get back to their particular car without confusion. He tells them as they are leaving their compartments to look for the red and blue, or orange and red bird on the wall. When they find it, they know they are back where they need to be.



Jaime is no ordinary conductor. Photo/Lisa Huard

Born and raised in the Philippines, he was a teacher of mathematics for most of his career. Teaching and sharing is a passion for this man and you can tell that by how helpful and engaging he is. He taught in his home country for 22 years, and then taught in Nigeria for nine. He then said he copied Eddy Murphy in â€œComing to America.â€ Landing in California, he taught in the Los Angeles Unified School District in the inner city for two years and that did him in. As a â€quitiredâ€ teacher myself, (I resigned as Iâ€™m still too young to retire), we shared our feelings about education for todayâ€™s youth. We both agree the education process is subject oriented and not student centered as it once was; that test scores and the emphasis on paperwork showing

accountability seemed to be at the top of the flagpole rather than performance and true competition. We talked about how everyone is more dependent on electronics, including myself, who can type quicker and for longer than I can hold a pen to paper these days.

We commented on how even with the progression of all of our new and fancy ways to communicate, that we may be communicating more, but are we doing it better? I even shared with him a recent email I had asking my niece if she still knew how to write complete sentences. You know those things with a subject and a predicate. Her emailed reply was something like; â€œo aunt lisa u r funy LOL katie.â€ Wouldnâ€™t you know it? Sheâ€™s having trouble in her language arts class in school.

Since retiring from teaching heâ€™s been working for Amtrak and loves it. He meets people from all over the world. He observes what everyone is doing. He enjoys seeing people look out the window at the land passing by and is amazed at the individuals who sit and play games on their iPhones or Blackberrys who never look up. You might think that Iâ€™m not looking up that much, but I am. After all, itâ€™s a 12-hour trip.

Money well spent

Anyone who knows us knows that my husband is not one to spend money on what he views as â€œfrivolousâ€ expenses. I have to tell you, he loved this trip. He loved being able to walk around, have what he wanted when he wanted it. He completely took advantage of all the train had to offer. The employees are friendly, helpful, and love that people are looking at train travel as a way to get around rather than the hustle and bustle as we â€œhurryâ€ to get to places these days without seeing anything along the way.

The scenery on this particular journey varies greatly

beginning in the industrial areas of Sacramento. You knew you were in the Davis area when the station looked pristine and had a million bicycles in bike racks parked as individuals caught the train to their jobs. There was interesting graffiti along the way to Salinas, Paso Robles, and San Luis Obispo. And then thereâ€™s the Pacific Ocean. How can you not love that view? The coast area south of Morro Bay is incredible, especially as you near sunset during the winter at about 5pm. The foam of the ocean coming to the shore, the scattered clouds with the sun setting make for a spectacular view. Some portions of the trip are on precarious cliffs and you feel like the train is literally running directly over the water. As it gets dark outside you can see the occasional off shore oil derrick between the main land and the Channel Islands all lit up with lights like a Christmas tree.

And in the days of everything running late and people being upset, this train ran early. Apparently itâ€™s one of the few things that do. There are points along the way when it has to wait as running ahead of time isnâ€™t permitted. Pretty tough to fit opposing trains on the same track.

For those of us who are lucky enough to do a bit of travel and have taken a seven-day cruise, you know what I mean by it takes you five days to figure out the ship and all that there is to do. Thatâ€™s just in time for your trip to end. Weâ€™ve all commented on how great it would be if in each individual cabin you wish someone had done a cheat sheet for you. Well hereâ€™s my version of a good cheat sheet when youâ€™re booking a trip southbound. First of all, if thereâ€™s just two of you get a minimum of the roomette. Itâ€™s a total treat and you donâ€™t have to spend the bigger money for the larger compartments.

Be proactive and engaging with the staff. Introduce yourself and shake their hand. This is common courtesy and common sense if you want to have a more personal experience. If itâ€™s not busy, ask your conductor if they can tell you a bit about the

train. They love the train and are most happy to share the information. They also have written information that can provide you with the history and particulars for those of us who are visual learners.

Eat at every meal service just to say you did and really feel you took advantage of the price of your ticket. Take advantage of the coffee, teas, water, juice, snacks and great meals included with your ticket because â€œles toiletteâ€ is just down the hallway. Get up and walk around. Itâ€™s funny watching everyone negotiate their gait as the train is moving along. Of course remember you look just as uncoordinated.

Visit the Parlour to view the scenery and just to have a different perspective. When booking your ticket get an even numbered if you are headed south. That will be the side that the ocean will be on. Check out your compartment; push all of the buttons, (Almost all. Skip the emergency one that can summon your conductor) and open things. I didnâ€™t realize there was a skinny closet to hang and store things and towels until after Salinas.

Take a pair of comfortable slippers or socks to be cozy. If you are sensitive to motion, bribe (or threaten) your traveling mate so you sit forward in the compartment. This seat should be designated as a â€œNo nappingâ€ zone.

Take disinfectant wipes with you, after all it is a public train and I do admit that there were times I wish I had my cleaning bucket with me. When using â€œles toiletteâ€ close the drape if stopped at a train station unless you are not at all modest. Although the scenery is fun to see with no obstructions, sit on the east side of the train in the Dining Car so the sun does not pound in your eyes. Carry a pen; your meals are included in your Sleeping Car status and youâ€™ll feel like youâ€™re Robin Leach who most of us remember as someone who would hang out with the â€œRich and Famousâ€. Talk and furthermore listen to people on the train; their

stories are interesting even if some of them are made up. Smile at all who pass your way. Look up, look out, enjoy.

P.S.

At 7:05 as we arrived at the Oxnard station and were exhausted. After all, we ate, drank, and laughed our way to Southern California. I never cracked open the book, never played cribbage. Perhaps on the return trip, perhaps not.