Snow sticking – resorts ready to open



By Kathryn Reed

White â€“ thatâ€™s the word for the day in Lake Tahoe now that the winds have calmed down.

Snow is rapidly accumulating at lake level, with it coming down even harder on the ski slopes. About 1.5 inches have fallen at the South Shore as of 4pm Friday. This is good news because Squaw, Northstar and Heavenly are expected to open Saturday.

Heavenly had to delay itâ€™s opening a day because of high winds. Those same winds shutdown Mt. Rose on Friday.

Winds have knocked power out in parts of Northern California and Northern Nevada. And where the lights are on, they are often flickering.

Gusts of 80mph grounded flights at Reno-Tahoe International Airport Friday afternoon.

Slick roads are being blamed for a fatal accident on Interstate 80. Spin-outs were seen on both sides of Spooner Summit between Carson City and Lake Tahoe Friday afternoon.

Check with Caltrans or NDOT for road conditions, or click on the icons on *Lake Tahoe Newsâ€™* Home page.

Forecasts called for a chance of snow all weekend.

Be sure to read *Lake Tahoe News* each morning for the ski report from Curtis Fong, The Guy from Tahoe.

Fallen Leaf Lake board meets Saturday

Fallen Leaf Lake Community Services District has scheduled a meeting to discuss among other items the future of a marina and general store operation at the mountain hamlet.

At issue for much of the year has been whether the Rich family will continue to run the operation after 14 years or whether the district board will take over the venture. The item has brought out many interested residents – some disgruntled, some not.

The meeting is slated for Saturday at 11am at the South Lake Tahoe City Council Chambers at Lake Tahoe Airport.

Learn about trends in the ski industy



All week *Lake Tahoe News* has been bringing you stories about what's going on at nine of the ski resorts in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin. Now find out what is going on within the ski industry as Publisher Kathryn Reed talks to Julie Maurer, marketing exec with Booth Creek Resorts, on KTHO FM-96.1/AM-590 and www.kthoradio.com. The show airs Saturday at 10am and Monday at 6pm. In Tahoe, Booth Creek owns Sierra and Northstar.

Nov. 20 LT ski report



Curtis Fong, the Guy from Tahoe, brings us today's ski report. The big news is the high winds throughout the basin. They should calm down as the storm arrives this afternoon. But it is gusty enough for Heavenly Mountain Resort to delay its season opening to Saturday.

All guns firing at ritzy Northstar

By Susan Wood

It is only fitting that â€œstarâ€ is in its name.

As well as hosting the opening of the Lake Tahoe regionâ€™s first 5-star resort with expanded lift access and more

snowmaking, Northstar-at-Tahoe gets in on Olympic action by launching the 2009-10 season with a biathlon course and instruction by competitive athlete Glenn Jobe at its Nordic center.

Weather permitting, the season will start Saturday.

It may be a year to mark the return of the Olympics to the West Coast in Vancouver, but Tahoeâ€™s own Northstar brings the only permanent biathlon range to the West. Appropriately so, the sport of biathlon has returned to Tahoe where it was introduced in the 1960 Olympics hosted by nearby Squaw Valley.



Northstar is ready to open. Photo/Bill Stevenson

One of the oldest winter sports, biathlonâ€™s roots come from the military when troops skied then shot at the enemy. Now the tracks range in distances from 7.5 to 20 kilometers, with points added depending on the scores of the shots. Cross country skiers glide to each target. Five targets have been installed near the caboose warming hut on Northstarâ€™s cross country trail network. Half are shot at lying down and the others standing up.

â€œItâ€™s one of the most watched sports in the Olympics. Itâ€™s huge in Europe, but it hasnâ€™t been popular in the United States because of the lack of permanent courses,â€ said Jobe, who competed in the 1980 Olympic Games in Lake Placid, N.Y., before becoming a cross country ski coach and

instructor. He will provide private, three-hour lessons Monday through Friday for ages 13 and older at $199 per person. Two people may get lessons for $249.

The Sierraville resident admits to being extremely excited about Northstar installing a range and course, which will be on display for a mock race and demonstration at the resort on Jan. 10 for Olympic Heritage Week.

From gold to red

Stein who? Destination skiers who travel the globe to stop in the likes of places like Stein Eriksenâ€™s Lodge in Park City, Utah, may find more competition in luxury accommodations based on Northstarâ€™s mid-mountain. The Ritz-Carlton Highlands rolls out the red carpet next month, featuring its own Highlands Gondola to carry guests from the Village to mid-mountain where the ski-in, ski-out mountain valet experience awaits.

â€œThe lodging pace for this winter is looking positive,â€ Northstar spokeswoman Jessica Van Pernis said of the Ritz inquiries.

The hotelier built the conglomerate with 170 guest rooms, 23 private residences and 25 fractional ownership units. When the guests arenâ€™t skiing or boarding, a 17,000-square-foot spa and fitness center and restaurant run by Executive Chef Traci Des Jardins is sure to keep most busy and satisfied.

On the slopes, Northstar beefed up its snowmaking capacity at the beginner teaching area located in the Highlands region. Early season conditions will play less of a factor for those itching to slide or skate out of their room or even discover how to do it. The snow surface enhancement coincides with more teaching programs and beginner terrain about twice the size as last year to further the family-oriented experience the resort is known for.

And this year, young boarders ages 4 to 12 will no longer be bored with instruction from a family member because the Burton Snowboard Academy is opening. Plus, a special development program from the introductory Northstar Training Lab can get many a skier out of the rut of bad habits.

First timers will have more to cheer about when making turns with a package for ages 13+ that includes a 2Â½-hour lesson, lift ticket and rental equipment for $99. A handful of programs for novices at bargain prices have been added to increase the number of people coming on board the snow sports and to keep the interest going amid challenging economic times.

â€œWhen the snow flew, people still came skiing, despite the economy. We saw a lot of (close by booking) and visits from our drive markets â€“ Reno, Sacramento and the San Francisco Bay Area,â€ Van Pernis said, echoing many resortsâ€™ observations.

Still considered a bargain at most standards, season pass rates held their own in sales last year into this season. Adult daily lift ticket prices remain the same this year at $79.

Northstar is located off Highway 267. Information may be obtained via www.NorthstarAtTahoe.com or by calling 800-466-6784 or 800-GO-NORTH.

Mt. Rose opening $4 million

lodge



By Susan Wood

Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe slides into another season with a new lodge set to open next month that offers a panoramic view of Washoe Valley, a feature not likely to be lost on its most faithful riders.

Skiers will be accommodated with signature food service and full bar inside the new 7,865-square-foot â€œWinters Creekâ€ aka Slide Lodge that seats 150. Another 400 may take to the deck located 4,000 feet above Washoe Lake on the southeastern edge of the Slide Bowl near the Blazing Zephyr chairlift. This side of Mount Rose is known for its local following.

A mix of glass and steel materials marks a European architectural style for the $4 million complex, a major investment in the ski industry today. Skiers and boarders who crave warmth as much as good deals, exciting events and various creature comforts will enjoy the sunâ€™s full force against the glass panels that help to heat the lodge through solar energy.

If itâ€™s energy one seeks out of a ski experience, Mt. Rose â€“ which rises to 9,700 feet at its summit – plans to deliver again with some new thrills mixed in with the traditional variety. The resort is hosting a â€œSaturday in the Parkâ€ rail jam this Saturday in Ponderosa Park at 1pm.

When the ski area opened Halloween weekend, it was on a limited basis. On Thursday it began operations seven days a week.

On Thursdays through the winter, women on boards and two planks with season passes may take advantage of free ski

clinics as part of an overall recognition of recession-busting measures most ski resorts are trying to make.

Daily lift ticket sales fell slightly last year, but resort officials discovered that most who partake in the sport want to seize on the financial benefit of purchasing a season pass for return visits.

â€œWe were down a bit on daily lift ticket sales, but up on season pass sales, so that tells us that our season pass holders were utilizing their passes more and sticking close to home,â€ Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe spokeswoman Kayla Anderson said. â€œWeâ€™ve had daily specials for our guests for about 15 years, so thatâ€™s nothing new. When people visit Reno or Lake Tahoe, weâ€™d like them to check out Mt. Rose for at least one day of their vacation.â€

A whole lineup of daily specials minus holidays will mark the season with bonus Mondays – $29 with a lift ticket purchase on Saturdays and Sundays, â€œOver the Hillâ€ ticket sales on Wednesdays for those over 50 running $35 (the student discount as well) and the weekender that gives you three days to ride for $130. The same price can grant a family a package called â€œRuns and Rosesâ€ that includes two adult tickets and two childrenâ€™s. Youth programs have also been introduced.

The all-day adult lift ticket normally runs $65. Half day is $50. Season passes cost $333.

The ski area known as Sky Tavern started operating a rope tow in 1941, and a dozen years later opened a resort named Reno Ski Bowl. During the 1960 Olympic Games at Squaw Valley the areaâ€™s Slide Mountain hosted the womenâ€™s downhill course.

Mt. Rose Ski Tahoe is located off its namesake highway, Highway 431, 11 miles from Lake Tahoeâ€™s North Shore. It can be contacted via www.skirose.com or 800-SKI-ROSE.

South Tahoe youth stand in line for H1N1 vaccine

By Kathryn Reed

A line of parents and children streamed out of Bijou Community School and down the hall â€“ all in an attempt to not get the flu.

Barton Community Hospital staff dispensed the nasal vaccination for the H1N1 flu for free to ages 2-9 on Thursday.

â€œI figured we might as well give it a shot. He goes to preschool and is around lots of other kids,â€ said Jeff Michalak after his 3-year-old son, Alex, was vaccinated. â€œIf it can prevent him from getting sick, I might as well do it.â€



Alex Michalak, 3, isn't thrilled to receive the H1N1 vaccine. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Alex wrinkled his nose and clearly did not like it when nurse

Marla Handsaker-Turk put the small device in his nostril.

She and the other nurses doling out vaccines did their best to calm the youngsters, though a few were in tears even without a needle involved.

The event went from 4-8pm, but the line started forming at 2pm.

Barton received its first batch of the swine flu vaccine on Nov. 10. That allotment was doled out to health care workers.

The 600 doses for the children arrived Monday.

Barton expects to get more, but doesnâ€™t know when. The nasal vaccine is a two-part process, so all the kids who were at Bijou Thursday will repeat the process â€“ most likely in December.

The 30 Barton employees were also using the flu clinic as a training drill â€“ which authorities said went according to plan.

South Tahoe groups receive $60,000

El Dorado Community Foundation handed out $60,000 Thursday night to a slew of South Lake Tahoe organizations.

It was a record amount of money given out at the event at Inn by the Lake.

However, not all of the requests could be met. Fifty local groups applied for $210,437.85.

In the Foundationâ€™s request for proposals it said, â€œWe are seeking proposals from any group whose program supports or enhances youth in our community.”

Recipients are:

- South Tahoe Middle School $1,000, Resource Field Trip to San Francisco for disabled students
- South Tahoe Middle School $1,300, University of Reno Field Trip 7th Grade Science
- South Tahoe Middle School $900, Freedom Writers Travel Expenses
- South Tahoe Middle School $1,000, Field Trip to Discovery Kingdom Vallejo 8th Grade
- South Tahoe Middle School $2,500, 6th Grade Field Trip to UC Davis/UC Berkeley/King Tut
- South Tahoe Middle School $1,700, Club Live Tolerance Projects/Field Trip
- South Tahoe Middle School $800, Tolerance Field Trip Los Angeles
- South Tahoe Middle School $1,750, PTA After School and Lunch Enrichment Program
- Lake Tahoe Unified School District $1,200, 3 Wheeled Bike Purchase Physical Education for disabled students
- Lake Tahoe Unified School District $2,960, Science Study PTA Presidents Roundtable
- Sierra House $1,500,Â Field Trip to Marine Science Institute Redwood City, King Tut San Francisco
- Sierra Tahoe Childrens Theatre $485, Summer Theatre Arts
- Lake Tahoe Community College $2,500, Foundation Scholarships
- Tahoe Valley Elementary School $2,000,Â Parent Teacher Organization Tahoe Valley Arts, Recreation and Theatre
- Tahoe Valley Elementary School $2,500, Sutter’s Fort Environmental Living Program
- Tahoe Valley Elementary School $1,250, AVID program support

- South Lake Tahoe Children’s Choral Society $1,250, choir supplies
- South Tahoe High School Challenge Day $1,500, Friday Night Live Anti bully project
- South Tahoe High School Gang Intervention $1,000, A Team
- Bijou Community School Two Way Bilingual Bicultural $4,527, Two Way Immersion Program
- Bijou Community School $1,500, PTA School Supplies
- Bijou Community School $2,000, Library Funding
- Bijou Community School $3,400, Charter Education Program
- Lake Tahoe Shinning Stars $1,000, Dance Scholarships
- Kiwanis Of Tahoe $2,000, Great Winter Coat Give-Away
- Bring Arts to Schools $2,800
- Soroptimist International of Tahoe $1,000, Sierra Youth Literacy
- Soroptimist International of Tahoe $500, Sierra Writing Festival
- Tahoe Youth and Family Services Drug Store Project at South Tahoe Middle School $1,000
- El Dorado County Library South Lake Tahoe Teen Group $1,585, After School workshops
- Boys and Girls Club of South Lake Tahoe $3,000, Academic Enrichment
- Tahoe Arts Project $5,000, Performing Arts Series
- CASA El Dorado $1,000, Child and Youth Enrichment
- Sports Connection $1,500, Youth Sports
- Circle of Hope $2,000, Young Girl Intervention
- H.E.R.O. Scholarship $3,000, Fund Scholarships

Realtors need a do-over vote

By Kathryn Reed

The 2010 officers for the South Tahoe Association of Realtors is a done deal. But the directors, well, thatâ€™s another story.

A fax machine with no ink is being blamed for the re-vote.



Michael Phillips

An email to association members says, â€œPlease be advised that the Election Committee has met and reviewed this yearâ€™s election. As you may be aware, the ballots for this yearâ€™s election were mailed out on a Friday, and a number of members faxed their completed ballots to the STAR office over that weekend. When staff arrived on Monday morning, they immediately saw that there was a problem with the fax machine. It was out of ink, and two of the ballots were completely illegible, with 7 more were very difficult to read, or partially illegible.â€

Itâ€™s not quite like Florida in 2000, but with more than 10 percent of the 87 ballots that were returned not being readable, the committee elected to have a do-over. Two votes separated fourth and fifth place.

Five people are contending for four director seats. Each is a three-year term. On the slate are Pamela Francis, Judith Hanson, Janin Inman, Michael Mulligan and Kathy Southern. The vote should be tallied the night of Nov. 25.

The association has eight directors who serve staggered terms.

This yearâ€™s installation dinner will be Jan. 8 at Edgewood

Tahoe.

The 2010 officers, who ran unopposed, are: Michael Phillips, president; Amanda Adams, president elect; Jill Stanton-Bricker, vice president; and Jill Teakell, secretary-treasurer.

Experts: Don’t get excited about El Nino

By Susan Wood

Alarmists and the apathetic beware: one thing is clear when facing a tropical phenomenon like El Nino this winter – weather is not an exact science.

With a moderate El Nino predicted to bring average temperatures and slightly more precipitation, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and â€œ2010 Old Farmerâ€™s Almanacâ€ have at least agreed in forecasting a season of extremes with snowfall and rain events quickly giving way to warm and dry California conditions.

The latter has led to a three-year drought in the state and Lake Tahoe falling below its natural rim for only the seventh time in the 109 years that records have been kept. Since Oct. 1 â€“ when the water year starts – it dropped below the 6,222-foot mark twice. This week the lake level fell almost a quarter inch.



Consecutive drought years make the need for piers obsolete at Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has declared this another drought year.

Even with a rare post-Columbus Day storm that drenched the region and brought the lake level up by 2.6 inches over the 120,000 acres, the drought-like conditions returned and allowed evaporation of all that water that equals 8.7 billion gallons.

These extremes have climatologists, ski resorts and even basic weather watchers scratching their heads.

â€œThere are certainly more variables, or I should say, extremes. But itâ€™s been that way since the â€˜70s,â€ said Gary Barbato, the National Weather Service hydrologist stationed in Reno.

The â€œAlmanacâ€ reports a winter of shoveling in December and power outages in January followed by an early quick thaw at the end of February into March.

Another water official is concerned about the frequency of the dry years and the intensity of the storms when they do show up.

â€œTahoe can weather one year, but itâ€™s harder with three, and weâ€™ve had three in a row,â€ California Department of Water Resources hydrologist Morris Reuss said. â€œWeâ€™re hoping for a fairly decent water year.â€

The average rise and fall of the lake level over the year may measure 3 feet. But when the loss totals 6 or even 9 feet over a three-year period, the pressure is applied to Mother Nature to make up the difference. And when she does, itâ€™s sometimes too much, too fast. The runoff carries debris, sediment and silt into the watersheds. This movement into Lake Tahoe presents a whole other billion-dollar problem called lake clarity.

The Western Regional Climate Center has categorized the lake level drop as â€œnot common, but not impossible,â€ said Reno climatologist Kelly Redmond, who just returned from a conference in Denver highlighting the properties of drought. The roundtable discussions included the possibilities of displaced populations in an â€œold-styleâ€ drought similar to, but not equal to, the Dust Bowl of the 1930s.

A report issued from NOAA this week noted October as having the sixth warmest global (land and ocean) surface temperature since 1880. The combined temperature measured 1.03 degrees Fahrenheit above the 20th century average of 57.1 F.

â€œWith climate change, we expect a drying out of the Southwest and a wetter Northwest,â€ Redmond said.

Redmond, a resident expert on El Nino, indicated NOAA has remained rather â€œnoncommittal on Lake Tahoeâ€ facing any big winter.

â€œIt should be slightly more wet, but not by much,â€ he added.

To put it into perspective, El Nino is a tropical weather phenomenon that originates off the shores of South America in

which sea surface temperatures in the eastern Pacific Ocean show a warming trend around Christmas â€“ hence the â€œChrist childâ€ Spanish name for the weather phenomenon. According to NOAA, the current El Nino has prompted ocean temperatures to rise 11 degrees Fahrenheit. This rise creates weather disturbances and storms that can slam California.

El Ninoâ€™s above average precipitation focuses on weather in the Southwest section of California, with the Lake Tahoe Basin teetering on the cusp of a rainy South and a dry Pacific Northwest.

Indeed, certain El Ninos â€“ usually considered strong ones as in 1982-83 and 1986-87 â€“ have produced abundant snowpack in the Sierra Nevada.

Whether it measures up to the anticipation from the scores of Tahoe die-hards who showed up in full force over the past week at Pray for Snow parties remains to be seen. â€œEl Ninoâ€ flew off the tongues of skiers and boarders eagerly waiting winter as much as the beer, snacks and snow calls.

Either way, todayâ€™s forecast is a good start.

A winter storm warning was issued by the National Weather Service starting at 1pm and ending at 10pm Friday. Moderate to heavy snowfall measuring 8 to 16 inches along the Sierra Nevada crest above 7,000 feet and 3 to 8 inches is forecast at lake level. Near zero visibility is expected due to strong wind, which could make for hazardous driving conditions.

The calendar says winter starts Dec. 21, but Tahoe says itâ€™s here now.