Barton bans young visitors

For the first time in its history Barton Memorial Hospital is restricting who can visit patients.

It all has to do with swine flu.

“The purpose of this new policy is to protect patients and staff from exposure to the illness and to conserve the supply of masks,” a press release states.

No longer can people under the age of 16 visit patients in the South Lake Tahoe hospital. Anyone younger is restricted to the waiting room of the Emergency Department and the waiting room of the hospitalâ€™s front lobby and must be under adult supervision.

This restricted visitation policy is in affect until further notice.

Barton is not the first hospital to implement restrictions on visitors.

Since April, three patients at Barton have been diagnosed with H1N1.

$415 million LT Restoration Act before Congress

By Erin Kelly, Gannett News Service

WASHINGTON – In a bipartisan push to save Lake Tahoe, members

of Congress from Nevada and California introduced a $415 million, eight-year bill Tuesday aimed at restoring the ailing lake.

The Lake Tahoe Restoration Act of 2009 would battle invasive species, improve water clarity, reduce the threat of devastating fires and protect wildlife.



Sen. John Ensign, R-Nev., supports bringing money to Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

The bill builds on legislation passed in 2000 that began to improve the lake and the surrounding forest and basin.

Read the whole story

Agreement renders Mittelstadt powerless



By Kathryn Reed

A distinct hierarchy now exists in the South Lake Tahoe city attorneys office. Patrick Enright is Jacqueline Mittelstadt's boss.

On a 5-0 decision Tuesday, the City Council chose to stop the dismissal process against Mittelstadt and instead demoted her and elevated Enright. His contract will be before the council Nov. 17. Mittelstadt returns to work Thursday.

The original contracts for the two were identical except Enright had assistant in front of his name. They were to act as equals. Not anymore.

The seven-page settlement agreement says, "The City Attorney will prepare proposed written performance evaluations of Mittelstadt, which will be reviewed in person with Mittelstadt, the City Attorney and the Transition Subcommittee prior to being finalized."

She will be evaluated every three months. No other employee has been scrutinized like this before.

The transition team is Mayor Jerry Birdwell and Mayor Pro Tem Kathay Lovell. These are the same two who made up the transition team this summer when it was obvious no one had thought about how much different the city attorneys office would be by doubling the number of attorneys on staff, nor had anyone asked what the newcomers might need.

One might conclude their oversight was ineffective since on Sept. 8 the council on a 3-2 vote decided it had had enough of Mittelstadt. Birdwell and Councilman Bill Crawford wanted to keep her.

What led to the majority of the council – Lovell, Hal Cole and Bruce Grego – to decide less than two months later to keep her is a mystery.

The public won't know if it was cheaper to keep Mittelstadt than incur a lawsuit; the public won't know if losing the Johnny Poland case last week played a role in Tuesday's decision; the public won't know who to believe anymore because the truth is not being disclosed.

Public in the dark

One policy the city does seem to have in place is censorship.

The five elected officials seem to have forgotten who they work for – the 25,000 or so residents of South Lake Tahoe.

They chose to tie their own hands in not being able to disclose the details behind the Mittelstadt ordeal.

"Mittelstadt and the City acknowledge that this is a confidential personnel matter and that neither party will discuss or disclose the terms of the Agreement unless required to do so by law or to operate the City's government. The Parties therefore will not discuss with the public and/or press the terms of this agreement," the document reads.

The document is public. But how it was reached and the reasons behind the words are still a mystery.

All the bravado of transparency and openness various councilmembers talked about in the weeks leading up to this point seem like a failed campaign promise – how ironic for that rhetoric to be quieted on Election Day.

Because neither the city nor Mittelstadt is talking to the media it's unknown if it will ever be made public why the city has been behaving seemingly so recklessly with taxpayer dollars, staff time and peopleâ€™s lives.

Without the facts, how is the public to know if the council is acting in the public's best interest? Some on the council have said to trust the majority – it knows what it is doing.

History tells us that deferring to elected or self-anointed leaders without question is a fatal, costly error in judgment.

The city government has been working under a veil of secrecy that needs to be lifted.

This agreement is just another layer of muck that clouds the clarity of what is going on at city hall.

Now what?

Mittelstadt's new job duties render her little more than an underling to Enright. She is only supposed to do what she is told by Enright.

"Mittelstadt will not hire staff or outside legal counsel, will not make purchases on behalf of the city or direct other city employees except support staff employees in the City Attorney's office," the agreement says. "Mittelstadt will perform any and all assignments given to her by the City Attorney. Mittelstadt will not speak to the pubic and/or press regarding matters of City business unless authorized or directed by the City Attorney."

By taking away all of her authority, the council clearly questioned her leadership ability and capability to work well with others.

The agreement goes on to say, "Mittelstadt will participate in counseling and training designed to enhance her communication and interpersonal skills to the extent deemed necessary by the City."

Why just her? That's one of the many questions not being answered. City Manager Dave Jinkens and the former city attorney kept their titles when they were ordered to

counseling.

Jinkens' role in this whole matter is still not completely evident. The council is not reprimanding him for his actions in regards to personnel issues like disseminating information to councilmembers about claims that have been filed.

Part of the agreement is Mittelstadt must drop all claims she has filed against any city staff member.

No one is saying where the claim Finance Director Christine Vuletich filed against both city attorneys is. Some speculate it will just disappear.

No one in the city has ever explained why Enright was not fighting for his job.

When Mittelstadt and Enright arrived, grumbling was heard in city hall about both attorneys wanting upgrades to the work environment – such as privacy and not sharing equipment with other staff when what they work on is confidential information.

Personality conflicts sprung up. Back biting comments seemed to be the norm.

In closed session on Tuesday the council talked about creating a formal grievance policy. It does not have one to date, which is part of the problem that the city found itself in.

Despite the demotion in title for Mittelstadt, it does not come with a reduction in salary. It does mean Mittelstadt won't have to attend City Council meetings. Her contract expires in May 2011.

Someone might want to update the city's website. Tuesday night it still said Mittelstadt is the city attorney.

Harmonica player’s death leaves void for Tahoe fans

By Denise Sloan Smart

I first fell in love with Norton Buffalo in the summer of 1977. The room was dark, save for a few twinkling lights coming from the radio stationâ€™s control board.

It was about 2am and it was just me and Nortonâ€™s first album, â€œLovinâ€™ in the Valley of the Moon,â€ from Capitol Records.



Norton Buffalo

We â€“ Nortonâ€™s music and I – were on the second floor of Harrahâ€™s Lake Tahoe, from where KOWL radio station broadcast for several decades. I was one of a few female disc jockeys back then. When the station owners were tucked into bed late at night, we DJs would expand the standard â€œplay listâ€ and throw in some new artists â€“ like Norton Buffalo.

Oh, my heart sang to his searing, superb harmonica. And that voice, oh, that voice.

That voice is now silent â€“ except for his recordings. Buffalo died last week at a hospital in Paradise. He had been diagnosed with lung cancer earlier this fall. He was 58.

Born in Oakland into a musical family – his father, a harmonica player, and his mother a vocalist in nightclubs in San Francisco in the early 1940s – he had big shoes to fill and he did so magnificently.

â€œNorton Buffalo only played (at Harrahâ€™s) a couple times in the early â€˜80s in the Stateline Cabaret,â€ recalled John Packer, spokesman for the Tahoe casino. â€œI personally have seen him a number of times with the Steve Miller Band and with Roy Rogers.

â€œObviously, this is a great loss to the Blues community and to the brotherhood and sisterhood of harmonica players,â€ Packer said. â€œHe was one of a kind, a very unique player and a really nice guy. He was always really friendly – of course most Blues people are.â€

Buffalo was regarded as one of the most versatile and talented harmonica players in the music business. Having performed and recorded across nearly every style of music, he became widely acclaimed as the finest multigenre harmonica player of all time.

His recordings, going back to his first releases on Capitol in 1977 and ’78 all received great reviews, are revered by his fans, and are a must in every harmonica player’s collection. While his talents on the harmonica were the major parts of his success, Norton was known as a strong and soulful vocalist – Steve Miller introduced him each night as his “Partner in Harmony” – and is was well regarded as a notable songwriter, engineer and producer.

For the last 34 years, Buffalo was a highly celebrated member of the Steve Miller Band, recorded and toured with some of the top names in music, worked in movies and television, and stayed busy performing and recording with his many diverse musical ventures.

Buffalo was highly sought after as a recording artist, having

played on more than180 albums by artists as diverse as Bonnie Raitt, Kenny Loggins, The Doobie Brothers, The Marshall Tucker Band, Johnny Cash, Kate Wolf, Commander Cody And His Lost Planet Airmen, David Grisman, Juice Newton, Laurie Lewis and Elvin Bishop.

Buffalo was nominated for two Grammys and was part of the Doobie Brothers Grammy award-winning album “Minute By Minute.”

Norton is also featured on Kenny Loggins new children’s album that was released last spring.

He performed in the Lake Tahoe area from the late 1980s to the early 2000s, primarily on the North Shore and in Reno and was best appreciated at his outdoor concerts such as those at the Lake Tahoe Music Festival and at Northstar.

In the 1990s, this reporter â€“ who first fell in love with his music in 1977 â€“ had numerous opportunities to interview the musician prior to his Lake Tahoe performances and he was always a joy to speak with. That was when I was editor of *Action* magazine at the *Tahoe Daily Tribune*.

He always spoke of his love of performing, songwriting and collaborating with other musicians, which he felt brought out the best creativity in everyone involved.

Iâ€™d remind him that I still had his first two albums on vinyl (33 1/3) and he politely laughed, with delight. I never did have the nerve to tell him that â€œwe were in loveâ€ from back in my radio days, when he first hit the airwaves.

Norton Buffalo was one of those musicians who should have been in the showrooms – not the cabarets, but mainstream audiences wouldn’t have “gotten it.” He was above their Saltine tastes. His music was caviar.

John Packer expects Mick Martin, who has a Blues party every Saturday from 1-5pm on (NPR) Capitol Public Radio, to do a

tribute to Buffalo Norton this weekend.

Denise Sloan has covered the Lake Tahoe entertainment scene since the 1970s.

USFS faces violations for practices in Angora burn area

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

The U.S. Forest Service has been cited for water quality violations at five Lake Tahoe projects, including a controversial logging operation in the 2007 Angora fire burn area.

Several violations caused significant erosion into Lake Tahoe streams, according to the Lahontan Regional Water Quality Control Board, which issued the notices. Erosion is a key cause of declining clarity in the storied alpine lake.

Read the whole story

10-year-old who helps kids earns national award

Ashlee Smith’s efforts to help young victims of the 2007 Angora Fire are being recognized on the national level.

The 10-year-old from Reno will be in New York on Thursday to

receive an award from the nonprofit World of Children.

She will be on “The Early Show” Wednesday morning.

Smith collects toys and books not just for Tahoe kids, but for youths involved in other disasters. Her family lost their home in a fire when she was 6.

Reports say Smith wants to use the $15,000 grant she will receive this week as seed money to look for matching dollars so she can expand her nonprofit Ashlee’s Toy Closet.

Thieves snatching full recycling bags

By Kathryn Reed

Something that wasnâ€™t anticipated when South Tahoe Refuseâ€™s blue bag recycling program started earlier this year was the value people would see in the full bags left at the edge of driveways.

People are stealing full blue bags to take out the material that is worth money. In fact, on one Tahoe Keys routes on Oct. 30 no blue bags were out. This wasn’t normal.

A woman called STR reporting seeing a vehicle taking them.

The problem is then replacement bags are not left for customers. The other problem is not knowing where the waste that doesnâ€™t have a buy-back value might turn up â€“ dumped somewhere or stuffed in a dumpster that a business then pays for.

â€œWe caught one guy in the county who did it,â€ said STRâ€™s John Marchini.

The thievery could be tied to the economy â€“ people needing a way to get cash.

â€œOur volume has tripled or more at the buy back center,â€ Marchini said of people turning in recyclables for cash.

Get out and vote



Have you done your civic duty?

Voting – it’s one of the things that sets us apart from other countries.

If you don’t vote, you haven’t done your job.

Prep work for winter safety

By Sallie Ross-Filgo

Now that the autumn months are upon us, itâ€™s a good time to

locate and label, or visu-ally indicate, where your water and gas shut-off valves are.

Do this both inside and outside of your home.

Then, when the snow flies again, and the possibility of frozen and buried pipes oc-curs, we will be able to quickly minimize any damage to your property.

Thanks for helping us serve you better.

Sallie Ross-Filgo works for the South Lake Tahoe Fire Department.

Flu vaccine running out



By Kathryn Reed

Roll up your sleeve fast, El Dorado County is just about out of flu vaccine – the regular flu shot, not the H1N1 concoction.

“We’re hoping we’ll get more vaccine, but all counties are in the same boat. There was a larger turnout than last year,” said Cathy Dunbar, immunization coordinator with El Dorado County Public Health.

Flu vaccination clinics are being canceled because the supplies are not available.

Dunbar said the county’s allocation is based on last year’s numbers. The problem is the demand is greater this year, not

that the supply is less.

She believes the awareness of the swine flu is leading people to want to be vaccinated against the regular flu.

This may mean fewer sick people out and about because more people have been immunized. Only time will tell if people who didn't get a shot will storm clinics and emergency rooms this year fearing what they have is more serious than the basic flu.

Barton Memorial Hospital is also running out of vaccine for the seasonal flu – and it ordered more than it had a year ago. The number of doses Barton had at the start of the season or what's left was not available late Monday.

County officials did not have figures either.

Barton vaccinates all students in Lake Tahoe Unified School District who want it – which in the past has been 65 percent of the population. Barry Keil, director of pharmacy for the South Shore health care system, requested more vaccine this year in anticipation of more people wanting a shot.

Still, Barton, like the county, is canceling flu clinics because the supplies can't meet the demand.

"At our last flu clinic on Friday at Stateline there were over 60 people there. That's a very high number for this time of year. Usually it's more like 40," Barton spokeswoman Denise Sloan said.

By this late in the fall, the number of people seeking out that needle usually tapers off.

Remaining seasonal flu clinics:

Barton will have one more seasonal flu clinic. It is Nov. 14 from 9am-1pm in the Barton Cafeat Barton Memorial Hospital, South Lake Tahoe. Cost is $20, free with a Medicare card.

Shots will be given until supplies run out.

El Dorado County Public Health has one more clinic in South Lake Tahoe. It is Nov. 10 from 9:30am-12:30pm at the Senior Center, 3050 Lake Tahoe Blvd.

How much swine flu vaccination will be coming to the county is not known. Dunbar said the first shipment arrived – the baby mist and that the county is waiting for the next shipment.

As of Monday, Barton had not received its first shipment of the H1N1 vaccine. It's expected to arrive any day. Schoolchildren and health care workers will be first in line for it because as they are the groups most at-risk.

Officials in El Dorado County are not as worried about the swine flu as their colleagues in Sacramento County. The Board of Supervisors there is expected today to discuss declaring a state of emergency because of the rapid increase in H1N1 cases.

For more information about seasonal flu clinics or the H1N1 flu, go to www.edcgov.us/publichealth.