USFS plans controlled burns Oct. 22-23

U.S. Forest Service Fuels Management Crews will conduct prescribed fire operations in the Meiss Meadows, Grass Lake, High Meadows, Baldwin Beach and Meeks Meadow areas on Thursday and Friday.

Residents and travelers can expect to see smoke from prescribed fire project areas.

This and other prescribed fire projects are designed to reduce wildfire risks to communities and critical resources. Smoke management is part of every prescribed fire burn plan, and efforts will be taken to reduce actual or potential smoke impacts on community areas.

To learn more about the efforts to reduce catastrophic wildfire risks in the Tahoe Basin, visit: http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/ltbmu/documents/fuel-reduction-projects/10-year-plan/LTBCFP_Public_Presentation_8_3.pdf.

To view maps that describe current prescribed fire project locations, visit: http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/ltbmu/fire/map-index.shtml.

Tahoe air too clean to require smog testing



By Kathryn Reed

It would be hard to find someone who doesn't believe air pollution contributes to the decline of Lake Tahoe's clarity. Then why don't residents of the Lake Tahoe Basin have to have smog checks on their vehicles?

Not enough people live here – not enough vehicles pollute the air. The two states don't count out-of-town vehicles, only ones registered here when making the rules.

Neither California nor Nevada requires basin residents to smog their vehicles. The five counties surrounding the lake – El Dorado, Placer, Douglas, Carson City and Washoe – are considered rural, at least in the basin, and therefore are below the population threshold warranting emissions testing.

The Bureau of Automotive Repair, part to the Department of Consumer Affairs in Sacramento, sets the rules. The Department of Motor Vehicles withholds registrations when vehicles fail a smog check.

It was Attorney General Jerry Brown who as governor signed the law in 1972 mandating smog checks in the Golden State.

The California DMV website lists 34 counties requiring smog inspections every other year. Another six, including El Dorado and Placer, require smog certificates within certain ZIP codes. The 96150 code requires it when the vehicle changes owners.

The remaining 18 California counties, including Alpine and Amador, don't require a smog test – ever.

Much of California requires the "enhanced" smog check. It's like putting your vehicle through a treadmill test. Wheels are

spun at 15 and 25 mph to simulate driving. The other test just sticks a rod into the tailpipe to register emissions.

In Nevada, it’s folks living in the urban areas of Washoe (Reno) and Clark (Las Vegas) counties who must routinely get their vehicles smogged.

Tahoe’s air quality meets the state and federal air standards which is why the basin is exempt from testing. Officials could not explain why smog testing is not put in place as a preventive measure instead of waiting until the air quality necessitates testing.

Even though the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency is charged with protecting lake clarity and other environmental issues, it does not have jurisdiction over smog testing. TRPA defers to state and county air quality regulators when it comes to smog.

Better technology in newer vehicles reduces the black gunk spewed from tailpipes. And in theory, visitors will have had their vehicles checked before descending into the basin – assuming they come from one of the counties requiring a check. Plus, if the permanent population dwindles, the number of potential problem vehicles diminishes.

One thing the bi-state agency has been doing since 1993 is collecting revenue from car rental agencies as a way to support public transportation. The $5.50 a day charge goes to the Tahoe Transportation District.

Fees are collected if the vehicle is rented by or delivered to someone in the basin. The fee is waived for locals renting a car.

Washoe County wins tech award

Washoe County has been recognized as a winner for its use of technology in the national Center for Digital Governmentâ€™s 2009 Digital Counties Survey in the 250,000 to 499,000 population category.

The 2009 Digital Counties Survey is an annual study by the Center and the National Association of Counties (NACo), which identifies best practices and recognizes those counties with exemplary digital service to their citizens by embracing new technologies to involve citizens, moving toward transparent government and increasing green and sustainable measures, while continuing to improve online services.

â€œOur County Commission and employees recognize the power of technology in meeting the public service needs of our community,â€ Washoe County Manager Katy Simon said in a press release. â€œCitizens expect their local governments to provide services 24/7 through the use of technology, and this national award recognizes Washoe Countyâ€™s progress toward meeting those expectations.â€

Boys & Girls Club open house

“Lights on after school” is a program put on by Boys & Girls Clubs across the country.

The South Lake Tahoe event is Oct. 22 from 5-6pm at 1100 Lyons Ave.

The open house will focus on how the South Tahoe club keeps kids safe and healthy, inspires them to learn, and how it

relieves working parents of worries about their children's activities in the afternoon.

For more information, contact Karen Houser at (530) 542.0838.

SLT city manager disputes LTN story

Oct. 21

Dear Ms. Reed:

The following comments were put together by staff in regard to published comments made in your column on October 15, 2009. The accuracy of comments made in this response below have been checked and verified by City staff. Some statements made to you in the story are at best inaccurate. While my preference has always been and will remain to protect the privacy of parties to personnel actions, inaccurate statements and characterizations of innocent employees cannot remain unchallenged.

Thank you for the opportunity to reply.

David Jinkens, (South Lake Tahoe) City Manager

Actual Clarification of Statements in October 15, 2009 Lake Tahoe News article: SLT city attorney requests public airing of grievance

1. Statement Re: Amount of money spent on outside legal counsel.

In the article, Mayor Birdwell is reported to have said that

before the attorneys came on board he repeatedly asked for those figures from the City Manager and Finance Director. He and Councilwoman Lovell asked for the numbers when they were acting as the hiring subcommittee and were given the budgeted amount of $196,000, and assumed we were working within budget. The City Attorneys discovered that $800,000 had been spent in a single year out of undesignated reserves.

Clarification: Nothing was â€œuncoveredâ€. The $196,000 did not include legal services budgeted in the Redevelopment Agencyâ€™s convention center project. All expenditures for legal services were within City Council approved budget, and no undesignated reserves were expended. Over the last several years the Finance Department and City Managerâ€™s Office have responded to several requests by Council Members for reports on the amount of money spent on outside legal services on a City-wide basis.

In January 2007 the Finance Department prepared, and the City Manager distributed to then Council Member Birdwell, upon his request, a summary of outside legal expenses for all departments for the fiscal years 2003â€04, 2004â€05, and 2005â€06. The amounts averaged approximately $700,000 annually each year. At the time, then seated Council majority was considering contracting out all legal services and not having a full-time city attorneyâ€™s office.

In February 2009 the City Managerâ€™s Office, upon request from Mayor Birdwell, prepared an analysis of budgeted amounts for contracted services expenses in fiscal year 2008â€09, which included outside legal expenses.

The hiring subcommittee requested the amount spent on outside legal counsel in connection with the recruitment of the new City Attorney. Staff provided the amount budgeted for outside legal services that appeared ongoing. The amount provided to the committee ($193,600) did not include the amount budgeted for legal services in the Redevelopment Agencyâ€™s CIP budget

for the convention center project that were one-time in nature and reimbursed by the developer. In retrospect, this exclusion should have been mentioned.

In June 2009, the City Attorneyâ€™s Office requested data from the Finance Department on the budget and expenses for outside legal services for fiscal year 2007â€08 and yearâ€toâ€date fiscal year 2008â€09. The City Attorney presented a report to the City Council on June 30, 2009 that indicated that the total amount expended over the 18 months of data by the City, less â€œpass through feesâ€ paid by the developer of the convention center project, was $842,601. This may be the number referred to in the article, where it is incorrectly characterized as a discovery that the budget was over spent and undesignated reserves were used.

In August 2009, the Finance Department did an analysis and reconciliation to the Cityâ€™s General Ledger of outside legal expenses over the same period (fiscal year 2007â€08, and yearâ€toâ€date through June 30 for fiscal year 2008â€09), including a detailed sorting by project, service, vendor, City, Redevelopment Agency, and Waste Management JPA

In 2007â€08 a total of $777,183 was expended for legal services. Of this amount $530,716 was expended by the RDA ($433,386 of which was paid by the convention center project developer).

Yearâ€toâ€date 2008â€09 expenditures totaled $432,939. Of this amount $112,185 was expended by the RDA ($70,857 of which was paid by the developer).

2. Statement Re: City TOT revenues budgeted $1 million higher than actual.

Clarification: Who would have known 1 Â½ years ago that the Nation and State would experience the worst economic downturn in modern history? Certainly, no one at the Federal or State government level predicted this situation. This is the worst

economic recession since the 1930â€™s and major declines in actual revenues vs. amounts budgeted currently are the norm for cities, states and other public agencies nationâ€wide.

National statistics indicate that tourism has declined over 21% in California this year, and more than that in some other major tourism markets. TOT revenue is always a volatile major revenue source in South Lake Tahoe. It is the most difficult to forecast due to many factors that may affect actual revenues, such as the weather, economic conditions, unemployment, home foreclosures, etc. The Cityâ€™s General Fund unallocated reserve requirement is set at 25% by the City Council as a hedge against economic downturns primarily because of the volatile nature of City revenues related to tourism (TOT and sales taxes). While City revenues are clearly down like they are to businesses, the Cityâ€™s overall financial condition is superior to the condition it was in 2002-2003 and it is better able to survive the economic downturn because of prudent financial planning and policies. Even in these difficult economic times, City government continues to provide essential public services to the community on a day-to-day basis and has not had to resort to massive layoffs of employees, reductions of services, closure of fire stations etc like in many other California cities.

3. Statement Re: Finance Director Reporting to the City Council

Clarification: This idea was one of the topics at the City Councilâ€™s Strategic Planning Session August 4, 2009. The City Council discussed this issue again at it August 18, 2009 meeting and decided not to pursue this matter any further. Research into the reporting structures in other cities found that in more than 98% of the cities and public agencies surveyed the top finance position reported to the City Manager or equivalent, rather than directly to the City Council. We have seen the disastrous impact in Washington D.C. and Sacramento when financial matters and estimates become

political and the City Council has wisely chosen not to have that happen here.

The Finance Director is a nonâ€□political position that is accountable to the City Manager, City Council, and ultimately to the public. The City Manager cannot just â€œspread cash around with little or no oversight.â€□ Spending must be within the Council approved budget, and in compliance with the Cityâ€™s financial policies and internal controls. The Cityâ€™s financial records and transactions are audited annually by an independent auditing firm, and the City has received clean audit opinions. The City Manager specifically recommended to the City Council on June 30, 2009 in a written and oral report, that all warrants and expenditures over a certain dollar amount be approved by the City Council on a City Council agenda and not one person agreed with this recommendation.

4. Statement Re: the $69,000 invoice for legal services.

Clarification: These legal services in regard to the ATM matter were authorized by the City Council, properly approved by the City Attorney and within available budget. At the June 30 City Council meeting, the City Attorney erroneously reported to the City Council that this bill was not properly approved. She was wrong. No backâ€□up documentation was provided by her to the City Council though the Finance Department had the backup documentation in their files. The Finance Director subsequently reviewed this transaction and prepared a full and complete report justifying the expenditure that was provided to the City Attorney on July 15, 2009 yet she made no correction to the City Council or Council record.

The payment was properly approved by the former City Attorney, Catherine DiCamillo after having received direction and approval from the City Council (during a closed session) to utilize the assistance of the contracted attorney to work with her on the pending termination of the Cityâ€™s contract with

ATM. Since neither the City Attorneyâ€™s Office nor the City Transit budget had sufficient budget for these legal fees, they were charged to the Nonâ€Departmental professional service account which had funding available that was not specifically earmarked for other services.

Tele-town hall with McClintock Oct. 21

Live tele-town hall Oct. 21 from 6:15-7:15pm with Rep. Tom McClintock.

To sign up for this live telephone conference, go to www.mcclintock.house.gov and “opt-in” to the tele-town hall by clicking on the “Contact Congressman McClintock” button, selecting the “Email Congressman McClintock” option, and filling in your telephone number.

By opting-in, you will receive a call every time he conducts a tele-town hall, which is typically twice monthly (by law, your telephone number cannot and will not be used for any other purpose than conducting official tele-town halls – no campaign calls and no advertising).

Free tickets to “The

Importance of Being Earnest”

Win two tickets to LTCC’s fall production of “The Importance of Being Earnest.” The college is looking for the most romantic story â€“ whether it is the most romantic marriage proposal or the most romantic date or experience.

Submissions should be no more than 500 words and must be received no later than Nov. 6 at 3pm. Submit to theater@ltcc.edu; include â€œLove in Earnestâ€ in the subject heading. Show opens Nov. 12.

The winning couple will receive two free tickets to the opening night performance of â€œThe Importance of Being Earnestâ€ at the Duke Theatre, or performance date of their choice.

The winning entry, as well as runner-up entries, will be posted in the theatre lobby during the run of the show.

For show dates and times – click on “The Importance of Being Earnest.”

Ski resort job openings boon for locals

By BillÂ O’Driscoll, Reno Gazette-Journal

As snow starts to pile up on the Sierra, the region’s ski resorts are seeking seasonal help for the coming winter.

During the next few weeks, most of the resorts will hold on-site job fairs for positions on and off the slopes.

At Squaw Valley USA, which will celebrate the 50th anniversary of the 1960 Winter Olympics in early 2010, nearly one-half of the resort’s planned 800 to 900 seasonal jobs have been filled.

Read the whole story

Roberts – Tallac gets a bad rap



Jessica Roberts

By Jessica Roberts

I just moved to South Lake Tahoe in June. I enrolled in Tallac because some issues came up in Southern California, which is where I used to live.

At first, it was really hard for me to adjust to everything, because I moved my senior year. Now, Iâ€™m acclimating and starting to feel more comfortable.

Tallac works for me because I can work at my own pace, which is a huge advantage seeing as I procrastinate less. Additionally, the teachers are really helpful and

understanding.

Even though Iâ€™m new to this school, I already feel the pressure of the stigma that has been attached to attending Mount Tallac. Thereâ€™s an assumption that everyone here is a â€œbad kid.â€ Personally, I donâ€™t think there is such a thing as bad kids. I think there are kids who make bad choices, myself included.

Everyone at Tallac has made mistakes, but they are here to fix them. Some of the hardest working kids Iâ€™ve ever met go to Tallac.

There are some students who are parents, but they go to school to get an education, have a job and take care of their kids. There are other students who have gotten in trouble with the law, but they are no longer involved in those kinds of situations.

Iâ€™m at Tallac because Iâ€™m credit deficient and I want to graduate and be successful. Iâ€™ve messed up a lot in school, but Iâ€™ve come along way.

Iâ€™m working really hard, just as many other students here are. Tallac has this reputation as a school for troubled kids, but I think it should have a reputation as a school for hard working students.

Jessica Roberts is a senior at Mt. Tallac High School in South Lake Tahoe.

Cervantes – An example of

change



Luis Angel Cervantes

By Luis Angel Cervantes

We hope our letters serve as a window of knowledge, mutually needed at times by our students, to entice our own community to look past and be fond of our school. With all my aspiration to be me, thank you.

I started my educational years at Bijou Elementary School; I remember a special teacher telling me â€œitâ€™s okay youâ€™re differentâ€ as if she took a glimpse into a whole different world for me. Maybe because she knew that after Iâ€™d leave Bijou School, Iâ€™d take bigger chances and would be introduced to all kinds of bigger choices and opportunities. Unfortunately in between moving schools, losing my mother to deportation, I made it through school in a logical sense. But when I entered South Tahoe High, I became disconnected.

Students around STHS, I believe, are more inclined to stick to their friends, and not branch out to their peers. This is why I didnâ€™t even think about trying to interact with different groups of students from which I was accustomed to. During my years attending South Tahoe High I definitely lost a sense of self, I blended in with everyone and when I wasnâ€™t blending in I was trying to be like other people.

I started a change which I now can truly understand. Change was overdue at a perfect time in my life, and all too great to ignore not to apply. I almost lost it all and now I wonâ€™t stop until I accomplish all without giving in.

Living life and learning fast really taught me a great deal. So with my newly predetermined strongest sense of self Iâ€™ve ever felt, I didnâ€™t think twice of joining the leadership team at Tallac High. This team has devoted love for our school, and dislike when people around our community look down at us as if we arenâ€™t trying just as hard or even harder to obtain a diploma at the end of the year just like the students at our neighboring school.

Our goal with leadership this year is to establish and leave a part of each one of our leaders at Mt. Tallac High, so that maybe future students can see how we didnâ€™t conform and actually stood up for the unheard or the unwilling voices to be heard.

Part of our change at Tallac is choosing our class color as purple and our mascot a Phoenix, a large intriguing bird symbolizing immortality and re-incarnation.

Luis Angel Cervantes is a senior at Mt. Tallac High School in South Lake Tahoe.