Ed Foundation funds Bijou after school clubs

A $4,800 grant from the Lake Tahoe Education Foundation led to the creation of eight after school enrichment clubs at Bijou Community School.

Parent Kathy Haven gave a brief report to the Lake Tahoe Unified board of education Tuesday about how well it’s going in such a short period of time. Two-hundred kids signed up to be in a club, but there is only room for 120.

Clubs include soccer, which will become cross country skiing,Â crafts, woodwoorking, book making, cooking and bike club.

The Ed Foundation is a nonprofit that raises money to help supplement programs the district would not otherwise be able to offer. The foundation’s key fundraiser is tonight from 6:30-10 at Harveys casino at Stateline. Food Fest will feature food by local restaurants, beer and wine tasting, a silent auction, and music.

Tickets are $35 in advance and $40 at the door, and are available at all elementary schools, the LTUSD office and Fox Gas.

Fired Zephyr Cove priest sues Reno diocese

By Martha Bellisle, Reno Gazette-Journal

A Catholic priest fired from his position at a Zephyr Cove church for seeking a protective order against a deacon after receiving a death threat has sued the Diocese of Reno and Bishop Randolph Calvo.

The Rev. Richard DeMolen, former pastor of Our Lady of Tahoe Church, said in the lawsuit that Calvo forced him to withdraw the protective order and failed to investigate the death threat. Calvo then fired DeMolen, the suit said, and sent a letter to parishioners that contained “false and defamatory statements.”

Read the whole story

Northstar hosts Collegiate Mountain Bike Championships

The 2009 Collegiate Mountain Bike National Championships are at Northstar at Tahoe Oct. 16-18.

The best collegiate mountain bike athletes will descend upon the largest bike park in Northern California for three intense days of racing. Come on out and cheer for your favorite college or university team as they race hard all weekend to bring the glory home to their school.

Oct. 16

The weekend will start in the Village at Northstar on Friday with the Women’s and Men’s Cross Country Race.

Oct. 17

On Saturday, racers will compete in the Women’s and Men’s

Short Track Cross Country race which starts in the Village and continues up on to the mountain and the Mountain Cross event which will take place on Zone 6 of the famed Live Wire trail in the Northstar Resort Bike Park.

Oct. 18

The final day of racing will be action packed with the Women's and Men's Downhill race on Karpiel, Dog Bone and Lower Sticks and Stones trails.

For more information,visit www.2009mtbnationals.com.

Hwy. 4 near Markleeville to be resurfaced

Alpine County will receive $1.5 million from the federal stimulus package to resurface 14.6 lane miles of Highway 4 near Markleeville.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzeneggerâ€™s California Recovery Task Force on Thursday announced that $53 million in American Recovery and Reinvestment Act funding has been allocated by the California Transportation Commission to five additional transportation projects in California.

â€œMy Administration is working hand in hand with President Obamaâ€™s team to pump Recovery funding into California quickly and responsibly to help drive our economy,â€ Schwarzenegger said in a statement. â€œInvesting in California's infrastructure helps put Californians back to work and supports long-term economic growth, while also reducing traffic congestion and improving our very quality of

life.â€

Other projects being funded are in San Luis Obispo, Santa Clara and Santa Barbara counties, and the Inland Empire.

For a comprehensive list of all projects that received allocations funding, visit: www.dot.ca.gov/docs/ctcprojectallocationsoct2009.pdf.

Domestic violence in South Tahoe



Find out on KTHO AM-590 what the South Lake Tahoe Women's Center is doing this month for Domestic Violence Awareness month. Listen Saturday at 10am or Monday at 6pm. It's also streaming at www.KTHOradio.com.

STHS grad plays with Alice Cooper tonight

South Tahoe High grad Chuck Garric will be in town tonight in Harrahâ€™s Showroom because he is part of Alice Cooperâ€™s band.

Garric will be at the Hard Rock CafÃ© instead Harveys at 4:30pm to chat with fans and friends.

The $5 fee for the party goes toward STHSâ€™s music program.

For more information, call (775) 588.6200.

West Slope, Sac County steroid lab seized

A 10-month investigation culminated in the arrests of three people this week when an anabolic steroid manufacturing ring was busted in El Dorado and Sacramento counties.

â€œIn terms of underground steroid labs, this was a huge seizure for this area,â€ Gordon Taylor, DEA assistant special agent in charge, said in a statement. â€œThe illegal use of anabolic steroids can be a dangerous practice, especially for young people. This danger is only compounded when drug rings manufacture steroids in unsanitary, unsterilized underground labs like we found in this case.â€

Agents seized a large anabolic steroid lab in Elverta, more than 500 vials and 1,850 capsules of anabolic steroid pills. Arrested were Jason Glavin, 37, of El Dorado Hills, Erin Oâ€™Neil, 40, and his wife Amy Oâ€™Neil, 32, both of Fair Oaks.

The investigation was a team effort between the DEA Sacramento District Office and West El Dorado Narcotics Enforcement Team (WENET), with assistance from the California Highway Patrol. The El Dorado County District Attorneyâ€™s Office is prosecuting this case.

Plumes of smoke from controlled burns

Much of the smoke you are likely to see today in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin is coming from various controlled burns. There is one near Stateline, Fallen Leaf Lake and another farther up the West Shore.

The burns are scheduled on days without wind, when the temperature is ideal and humidity levels are just right. The piles are brush that has been cleared from forested areas to reduce the risk of a wildland fire.

SLT city attorney requests public airing of grievance



Jacqueline Mittelstadt

By Kathryn Reed

Transparency within South Lake Tahoe's city government is about as clear as mud, which is appropriate since plenty of it is being slung. But what it's sticking to is even less clear.

On Oct. 20 the City Council is expected to decide Jacqueline Mittelstadt's future as city attorney. Mittelstadt told *Lake Tahoe News* she is going to request the dismissal hearing be in open session.

Also that day, the council is scheduled to discuss in closed session City Manager Dave Jinkens' actions related to personnel issues.

"I expect to be fired," Mittelstadt said Wednesday. "The community is being short-changed and money is not being spent with transparency and openness. (The community) needs to know what's going on. It's a bigger issue than me."

Mittelstadt and Patrick Enright started work June 1 as attorneys for the city. It was Councilman Bruce Grego who lobbied his colleagues to hire two instead one lawyer, as had always been the policy. This was so the city could reduce the number of outside attorneys it hires.

To curtail spending, council gave direction to the new attorneys to draft an ordinance what would prohibit the city manager from hiring outside counsel without authorization from the city attorneys or City Council.

The language and action got muddled when Mittelstadt missed a meeting during the summer, and Enright and Jinkens tweaked the language to make it weaker.

It had appeared the council unanimously supported keeping legal matters in the city's legal department.

However, in a 180-degree twist, Grego got consensus from the council to have on next Tuesday's agenda an item that would return the hiring of outside legal counsel to the city

manager.

Grego was unavailable for comment Wednesday night.

Cost of doing business

Another initial directive from the council to Enright and Mittelstadt was to find out how much money was being spent on outside counsel.

Mayor Jerry Birdwell said before the attorneys came on board he repeatedly asked for those figures from Jinkens and Finance Director Christine Vuletich. He said he and Councilwoman Kathay Lovell asked for the numbers when they were acting as the hiring subcommittee. (Lovell was unavailable for comment Wednesday night.)

“We requested the amount we were spending on outside counsel,” Birdwell said. “We were given $196,000. That’s what was budgeted. I assumed that we were working within that budget. Little did I realize that was not so.”

Mittelstadt and Enright uncovered about $800,000 had been spent in a single year on outside counsel.

Birdwell said the money came out of undesignated reserves from various departments.

At one point this summer it looked like the council was going to make the finance director’s position be accountable to the elected officials, as is the case for the city attorneys and city manager.

Vuletich reports to Jinkens. She is the one who for the past two years has proposed a budget that says the hotel tax is going to increase. Projections were off by $1 million for 2008-09. (Despite the fiscal year beginning Oct. 1, the council still doesn’t have a budget for 2009-10.)

With more convoluted discussion by the electeds, Councilman

Hal Cole decided to let his idea about the change fade away.

By keeping with the finance director being accountable only to the city manger, the city manager then has discretion to spread cash around and spend with little or no oversight.

Complaints roll in

As the expenditures on outside counsel were coming to light, Vuletich on Aug. 10 filed an Employer's Resource Management Association complaint against Mittelstadt and Enright. Mittelstadt has never seen the complaint nor has it been resolved.

Mittelstadt's attorney and the city's outside counsel hired to handle her situation disagree whether the ERMA needs to be settled before the council votes next week to keep her on the city payroll.

At some point, Mittelstadt filed an ERMA complaint.

Why Enright is not fighting for his job like Mittelstadt, is part of the lack of transparency at the city.

"My reports resulted in retaliation against me," Mittelstadt said. "I do believe wrongful conduct occurred (by others)."

But the fact is Mittelstadt and Enright worked side-by-side, with both their names on the reports.

One of those reports was uncovering a $69,000 bill approved by Jinkens for outside counsel. Any expenditure more than $30,000 was supposed to be brought to the council for its OK.

Asked if he thought someone might be getting a kickback from the contracts, Birdwell said, "I have no reason to believe that at all."

Jinkens did not return a call to his home last night.

It would take outside legal counsel to do a forensic

accounting of the city's books, of employee bank accounts as well as councilmembers' to determine if anything inappropriate, illegal or unethical has occurred.

On Aug. 14, Jinkens sent an email to all five councilmembers about the complaint Vuletich had filed.

On Aug. 17, Jinkens sent Mittelstadt an email with eight points outlining how he saw fit to resolve the employee complaints. All councilmembers have reportedly been given a copy of this letter.

Point No. 3 says, "Any matter or consideration to make the Finance Director an at-will employee reporting to the City Council will be stopped."

Mittelstadt didn't respond to the email. However, she met in private with Jinkens after the Sept. 1 council meeting. He printed a copy of the email for her and read it to her.

Mittelstadt said in discussing the points with Jinkens she was left to believe that if she didn't push for Vuletich to be under the purview of the council, Jinkens would get Vuletich's complaint against her dropped.

Mittelstadt said she wasn't going to be part of unethical behavior.

Two days later Mittelstadt was told the majority of the council wanted her resignation and that she had until noon that Friday to make up her mind. She said no.

It was on a 3-2 vote in closed session Sept. 3 (a vote that has never been put into the public record). Grego, Lovell and Cole said start the termination process.

Cole's voicemails were full and he did not answer the phone Wednesday night.

On Sept. 14, Crawford hand-delivered to Human Resources

Director Janet Emmett a complaint against Jinkens. Crawford believes Jinkens violated the privacy of Vuletich, Mittelstadt and Enright when he sent the Aug. 14 email. Part of his complaint also includes the Aug. 17 email.

It’s in closed session Tuesday that this matter will be talked about.

The future

To add a layer of muck to the situation, the El Dorado County Grand Jury is looking into the whole South Lake Tahoe city attorney situation.

“Every reason I’ve heard for why they are getting rid of me is not true,” Mittelstadt said.

She wants the truth to be in the public domain – that’s why she wants an open hearing that will be televised and recorded for perpetuity.

If fired, she will be owed three months pay. She has been on paid administrative leave for six weeks at a cost of more than $10,000 a month to the city.

If she were to sue the city, the expense of hiring this attorney that all five councilmembers had originally highly touted, could skyrocket. It is not known how much the city has paid in legal fees to terminate Mittelstadt’s employment.

Mittelstadt realizes fighting is a delicate situation for her professionally. She could lose her license if the state rules she said more than she should have.

“But it’s important for the public to have the truth,” Mittelstadt said.

Initial phase highlights cooperative nature of bi-state park



Van Sickle Bi-state Park from Heavenly's gondola. Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

Nevada park officials were granted a weeklong excavation extension by TRPA to work past today’s deadline of no more dirt moving so progress can be made on the 725-acre Van Sickle Bi-state Park that is situated under the Heavenly gondola near Stateline.

Storm drainage work on the $2.8 million phase of the park that is split between California and Nevada behind the casino corridor was put to the test as Tuesday’s severe storm roared through the South Shore.

“We’ve been impressed with everything the contractor has been able to do,” parks Project Manager Ned Wallace said Wednesday. “Everything was working fine after this recent storm.”



Working on the park's stormwater drainage system.Â Â Photo/Kathryn Reed

This wasn’t the first time the grounds have been tested. The Gondola Fire in July 2002 ignited under the gondola on the 150 acres California bought from rancher Jack Van Sickle. Van Sickle donated 575 acres to Nevada with the intention of building a park.

The park as first envisioned was novel for being an urban trailhead to nature and made history as the nation’s only bi-state park.

Earlier this year when it became apparent California had no money to chip in for the day-use picnic area, the state granted an easement to the Silver State to proceed with the first phase of construction. There’s talk of California selling bonds to fund the other four phases of the master plan, which includes a visitor center and campground large enough to accommodate recreational vehicles.

“Our biggest challenge for the park is it not getting built,” Wallace said. This is why baby steps that show resilience go a

long way.

Park officials are starting at Montreal Avenue along the gondola line and working uphill. This 2.5-acre phase of the project calls for picnic tables near the historic barn, a rest room, parking lot with spaces to accommodate horse trailers, and a half-mile of road to the lot.

Bonds approved by Nevada in 2007 funded the stormwater drainage system billed as an environmental improvement project. The road is proposed to be porous pavement designed to absorb stormwater that flows from the ridge toward Lake Tahoe. EIP projects are all about preserving or enhancing Lake Tahoeâ€™s clarity.

Nevada wants contractor Burdick Excavating Company to complete the phase next August. Nevada park officials have until Oct. 22 to cap-off work for 2009.

Tahoe Rim Trail Association volunteers have begun building a connector trail to the 165-mile route that circles the lake. The group also agreed to clean the rest room once it’s built. California once indicated it would staff the park, but with its reoccurring budget problems those best-laid intentions remain to be seen.

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