Arson suspected in South Tahoe house fire



Flames fully engulf a house Jan. 29 in South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Denise Haerr

A fire Wednesday night that completely destroyed a house in South Lake Tahoe looks to be have been deliberately set.

Police officers had gone to the house in the 1100 block of Long Avenue the afternoon of Jan. 29 on a report of someone forcing their way in. Officers said it appeared someone had slept there. But no suspect was found.

The modified A-frame is being repaired because of damage from burst pipes earlier this winter, so no one was living there. When a repairman was at the house earlier this week he reported to the fire department and Southwest Gas that he smelled natural gas and saw that gas valves on various appliances had been turned on.

The fire was called in at 6:10 Wednesday night. It’s estimated that the loss of the structure is $300,000 and contents $20,000. The fire spread to nearby trees, but crews were able to keep the flames from reaching other structures or becoming a forest fire.

South Lake Tahoe police detectives have launched a criminal

investigation along with arson investigators from South Lake Tahoe, Lake Valley and Tahoe Douglas fire departments.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Nev. lawmakers reluctant to define gifts

By Andrew Doughman, Las Vegas Sun

Several state legislators took a jaunt to Israel last year, touring the Holy Land and dining beside the Sea of Galilee.

The largest Israeli lobbying group in the United States bankrolled the all-expenses trip, but when it came time this month for elected officials to report gifts they received in 2013, there was no reference to the trip.

The traveling lawmakers were only some of the elected officials in Nevada who accepted gifts sometimes worth thousands of dollars but declined to report them as required by state law.

Some of them dispute whether they legally need to report these gifts – in part because there is no explicit definition of a "gift" in state law.

Read the whole story

Mini temblors rattle Virginia City

By KOLO-TV

VIRGINIA CITY – A swarm of earthquakes has hit the Virginia City area.

The seismology lab at UNR has recorded 27 tremors since 7:30 Wednesday night. The most recent one, a 2.6 magnitude, occurred about 3:42 Thursday morning.

Read the whole story

Snow accumulating; most schools open in Tahoe



Snow is falling Jan. 30 in Lake Tahoe. Photo/LTN

The forecasters were right – it's snowing in Lake Tahoe.

Classes will be starting an hour later than usual at Zephyr Cove Elementary and Whittell High schools.

All schools in Lake Tahoe Unified are open and operating on a normal schedule. The same goes for Lake Tahoe Community College. Incline Village schools are open, too.

Truckee Tahoe Unified has called Jan. 30 a snow day.

About 4 inches had fallen in South Lake Tahoe by 6am, with it still coming down. A winter storm warning for the basin remains in effect through 4am Friday.

“Periods of light to moderate snow will continue through mid-morning today,” according to the National Weather Service in Reno. “A break is likely this afternoon with just a few snow showers before another burst of snow tonight.”

Chains or snow tires are required over most mountain passes. For current road conditions, click on the state icons on the home page of *Lake Tahoe News.*

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

South Shore businesses seek tools for success

By Kathryn Reed

A brainstorming session of more than 70 business owners and employees on Tuesday uncovered a wealth of topics designed to make the South Shore more successful.

At the annual Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce breakfast Jan. 28 much of the focus was on tapping into what the people in the room want for the coming year.

The chamber plans to host three industry lunches in 2014, with the first being in April. It will focus on health and wellness services that complement traditional medicine. The other two lunch topics may come from ideas generated this week.



B Gorman, CEO of Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce, talks Jan. 28 about plans for this year. Photo/Provided

Chamber officials were also looking for ideas for Tech Tuesdays, a segment the business group introduced last year.

While the events are geared toward chamber members, most are open to non-members at a higher price.

Businesses want to know how to manage their information off-site, how to recover after a disaster, more about Excel, search engine optimization, constant social media updates, and the basics of databases.

They also want more in-depth sessions on recreation, events, how to retain good employees in the shoulder season, how to increase their business' value, low-income housing, nonprofits, how to engage other businesses in an event, aging infrastructure, federal health care regulations, how businesses can adapt to climate change, and soft skills.

The various tables were also asked to talk among themselves

about challenges they overcame in 2013 and successful best management practices.

Paula Lambdin, who works for Golden Sierra, complimented Brent Truax of the Landing Resort Hotel on how well his employees are trained. They noticed her government license plate and were very attentive.

“At some properties I don’t get the time of day,” Lambdin told her tablemates.

Truax said his philosophy is to hire personalities as much as it is to hire people with experience.

Eric Swartz with Peak 1 Group brought up the importance of managing online reviews and that positive and negative comments deserve a response.

Truax’s rule is to respond to 80 percent of the negative comments and 20 percent of the positive.

Barb Tenney at Après Wine Co. uses comments as a teaching moment with employees. The positive ones get forwarded to everyone, while a one-on-one talk occurs with the person who is the subject of a less flattering review.

B Gorman, who runs the chamber, said new this year would be political endorsements. The group is starting with the California side. There is a South Lake Tahoe City Council race, El Dorado County Board of Supervisors, Lake Tahoe Unified, Lake Tahoe Community College, South Tahoe Public Utility District, potential local initiatives, possible tax issues and other county positions on the ballot.

As with past years, a group will make excursions to Sacramento and Carson City to lobby lawmakers.

The chamber is also planning a trip to Park City April 2-5. Promotional material says, “During our visit to Park City, we will be looking at innovative ideas and strategies in the

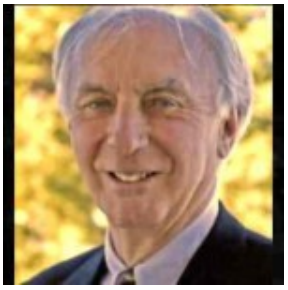
areas of transportation, walkable main streets, mixed use redevelopment as well as affordable living and performing arts.”

Opinion: Media slant DiMatteo-Swanson articles

To the community,

Last week several sources published a report that Angela Swanson was cleared of bribery charges. They simply quoted what the district attorney said as if it is fact. You asked no one else to comment while knowing full well that many of us came to question the district attorney’s actions and in fact the DA dismissed all charges against Mr. Gino DiMatteo, in embarrassment over the way this matter was handled.

They articles leave the reader with the impression that Mr. DiMatteo is some sort of hated criminal and Ms. Swanson is innocent with statements like, “no receipt was given.” Does not sound very innocent to me. It sounds like she took the money with some other intention than charity. They call Mr. DiMatteo a “career criminal” when in fact he followed the letter of the law in opening the store and at that time ran another very mainstream business.



Ted Long

They copy the DA's statement that, "Mr. DiMatteo clearly believed that he needed to make a donation." Based on what evidence? As a person who actually looked into it, that is far from the truth. Had you bothered to ask, I would have shown you so.

The expression, "You scratch my back, I scratch yours" was said when the DA was trying to get Mr. DiMatteo to wear a wire to entrap Ms. Swenson and Mr. DiMatteo refused. This by the way has a lot more to do with the circumstances then anything else.

As to the conclusion that Mr. DiMatteo is a prior convicted felon, a statement taken without support, isn't it the city's job to investigate potential applicants? Yes, in deed it is, and they did. Did you question or even wonder why the police investigation prior to the issuance of the license did not reveal such information? No, you did not. Had you, your story would have been very different. As to the federal arrest and Mr. DiMatteo prison sentence, to this day believe he was set up. Look at the facts. He is running a California legal, city authorized dispensary, he has inventory and products, the city without notice closes him down. What is he supposed to do with the inventory? Under the California law he must return it to the cooperative member growers, the raid was days after the closing before final arrangements could be made. It certainly is no big surprise that he would have some product left over, is it?

I do not have nor have I ever used marijuana, nor have any interest. I do believe the so-called war on drugs is a joke, just as Prohibition of the '20s was. I have seen first-hand the benefit of the use by cancer patients, and I am sure if you had a loved one doing cancer treatment, you would want them to have the benefit. I also know that there are many more deaths and tragedies from alcohol than there ever has been

with marijuana, and society needs to work this out. I also know that the force of the government is overwhelming. If an average citizen is arrested, guilty or not he may look forward to months of struggle and tens of thousands of dollars to spend to defend himself. The issue is only aggravated when a newspaper publishes the authority's views, with no counter balancing opportunity for comment; the public is left with a very inaccurate view. I am not Mr. DiMatteo's best friend, I do know him and he comes across much more like a loving family man then "Bragger of connections to organized crime." Which, by the way, I never heard him say.

Ted Long, South Lake Tahoe

N. Shore celebrating 2014 Olympians

North Lake Tahoe has caught the Olympic spirit.

Tahoe City Public Utility District and North Lake Tahoe Resort Association have organized an event for people to show their support of Tahoe City Olympians and their families.

There will be a "GO USA/NORTH TAHOE" group photo at 3pm Jan. 31, followed by a reception at the NLTRA Visitor Center across from the Tahoe City Y.

Flames consume South Lake Tahoe house



Flames destroy a house in South Lake Tahoe on Jan. 29. Photo/Denise Haerr

Flames were still shooting into the night sky Wednesday after a house erupted in flames in the early evening.

Fire Chief Jeff Meston told *Lake Tahoe News* it is a difficult fire to fight. It's a modified A-frame that was being remodeled. He expected crews would be out there quite a while.

All city resources were at the blaze on Long Valley Avenue in the Bijou Pines neighborhood, along with firefighters from Lake Valley and Tahoe Douglas.

The fire started about 7pm Jan. 29, with flames still shooting in the night sky at 8:30pm.

"The lots are small and close together with lots of trees," Denise Haerr, who lives in the neighborhood, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "Thankfully, it's been raining all day."

At 9pm, she added, "The flames are still leaping within the

home. We are so thankful for the firefighters protecting our neighborhood."

Meston said no one was home when the fire started.

Haerr said she never saw anyone at the house.

It is too soon to know how the fire started.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Truckee photographer's work in HGTV dream home

Truckee based landscape photographer Elizabeth Carmel has four black and white prints of Lake Tahoe in HGTV's 2014 showcase dream home.

The 2014 HGTV dream home is located in Truckee at Shaffer's Mill. It will be given away during the HGTV sweepstakes. Truckee-based Ward-Young Architects designed the HGTV Dream Home. Proceeds from tours of the home benefit the Tahoe Forest Health System Foundation.

Carmel's photographs are "Night Journey", "Clearing Fog", "Winter Sunset", and "Silver and Gold II". They are featured in an upstairs landing seating area of the house.

Driver plows stolen vehicle into Grace Hall

By Kathryn Reed

Julie Smith-Tunnell is accused of stealing her second vehicle in two months.

The most recent time ended with the vehicle going into the front of Grace Hall at St. Theresa's Catholic Church in South Lake Tahoe.

"We found her lying down behind a rock about 30 feet from the collision," police Lt. Brian Williams told *Lake Tahoe News*. He added that the 40-year-old South Lake Tahoe woman was lying on the keys, but denied being the driver.

The vehicle had been stolen from the second floor of Harveys in Stateline where employees park.

The owner of the vehicle on Saturday night realized his backpack with the keys inside of it had been stolen from the employee lounge. He took the bus home, leaving his vehicle there. But when he returned Sunday the Yukon was missing.

He then found out his Yukon had been driven into Grace Hall on Jan. 26 about 1am. Smith-Tunnell was reportedly traveling down Lyons Avenue toward Highway 50 at a high rate of speed when the crash occurred.

The vehicle and building sustained significant damage.

The force of the GMC Yukon Denali hitting the structure knocked goods off the shelves that are given away by Bread & Broth each Monday. There was concern the Jan. 27 meal would have to be canceled or moved to a new location.

Parishioner Paul Camacho organized a crew to clean up the mess

and secure the building as well as it could be. Dave Walker with the city's building department said it was OK to let people inside.

"We were very relieved we were able to go ahead and serve dinner," Beverly Sass, church secretary, told *Lake Tahoe News*. "This Friday we have our biggest fundraiser for the school, the 20th annual crab feed. We are able to go ahead and do that. Then we'll reassess things next week and replace the damaged beams."

Smith-Tunnell was arrested on charges of stealing a vehicle, possession of stolen property and driving without a license. In November she was arrested on a stolen vehicle charge. She remained in jail Jan. 29 on $51,500 bail.

Sgt. Pat Brooks with Douglas County Sheriff's Department said it would be up to the district attorney if Smith will face charges in Nevada.

Williams said auto thefts have been occurring at least every other week since the temps dropped. He said people are leaving them in their driveways to warm up and then someone swipes them.