

State of roads dig deep hole in South Tahoe



Even though some roads in South Lake got repaired this summer, most make for a bumpy ride.Â
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

Forget that time heals all wounds. With respect to South Lake Tahoe roads, time is the enemy “ one the City Council has grappled with for more than eight years.

While the debate over how to fund street repair continued in council chambers last month, the network of 130 miles of roads has disintegrated to a level where city engineers believe 65 percent of the streets will need to be reconstructed by 2024. City staff is basing its estimate on a pavement management study conducted by a consultant two years ago that painted anything but a rosy picture of the public works program.

By next year, almost 40 percent of the roads are projected to be rated in “poor” condition. Airport Road is one of

those. Under an elaborate rating system, the consultant estimated the network would bump two-thirds of the roads in the "every poor" category in the next 14 years.

Less than a quarter of city streets are considered "fair," "good" or "very good."

Even though most city officials agree the streets need to be overlaid or patched, the amount of money earmarked for the program remains in jeopardy every year.

The \$1 million allocated for street overlay in this budget year was slashed by more than half as a result of an unprecedented economic downturn. This wasn't the only year the roads took a back seat in the budget. No budget was allocated in 2001, 2004 and 2005.

According to a staff report, the cost of asphalt has skyrocketed by 130 percent from \$37 per ton to \$85. Asphalt is oil-based, contingent on the volatile price of a barrel of oil in world markets.

City Engineer Jim Marino said staff is looking into using a new rubberized chip seal next year. The seal is a mix of oil and crushed rock. Crews would cover the surface twice with the hope ultraviolet exposure and snow removal equipment don't break down the double layer.

"With limited funding, we should be focusing on keeping our good roads in good shape in order to extend lifespan," Marino said.

Adding to the problem is Sacramento. The state temporarily crawled out of its budget quagmire to patch its funding holes. In doing so, it is still considering taking back California's gas tax money of 18 cents a gallon local governments have come to rely on.

Public Works Director John Greenhut has called his task of

developing a budget for his department “challenging.” The city’s fiscal year begins Oct. 1.

But the cry of being poor doesn’t sit well with locals. Motorists and residents like Evan Williams have complained to the city in recent years about the state of Venice Drive. The popular Tahoe Keys thoroughfare where Williams lives delivers a bone-jarring experience in a vehicle and bicycle trying to negotiate 3- to 5-inch-wide cracks that cover the Keys water lines.

“Every time any vehicle of weight goes by (over the cracks) the whole house shakes,” Williams said. “The city has some culpability of maintaining our roads.”

But Public Works contends simply patching these cracks won’t work because the original asphalt failed to bind adequately enough to handle the wide temperature variances this region experiences. To fix the expanding and contracting of cracks on Venice the city would need to go in and grind out the problem areas before filling in.

Mayor Jerry Birdwell has asked the Public Works department for a list of streets in need of repair. He wants to find one-time funds to fill the holes that pop up every year.

At an August council meeting, Councilman Bill Crawford suggested the city Budget and Finance Committee reduce the general fund reserve earmarked for emergencies be reduced from 25 percent to 15 to help “get serious about public works.”

Susan Wood is a freelance writer based out of South Lake Tahoe. She may be reached at copysuel@yahoo.com.

Wine and radio



Hear Justin Boeger, president of the El Dorado Winery Association, on KTTH AM-590 (www.kthoradio.com) at 10am Saturday or Monday at 6pm talk about what's going on with this year's crush and what else is going on with the wine industry in El Dorado County.

DCSD board gives Lark extension



Carol
Lark

When all was said and done, Douglas County School District Superintendent Carol Lark was given an extension to her contract. It now expires July 2011.

The board met more than once to decide if it would honor Lark's request to have the one-year extension.

“It was hard fought, but it was not as ugly as the June 17 meeting,” board President Cindy Trigg said.

No changes were made to the contract. Lark gets a “step” raise per Nevada law of 2.5 percent now that the Legislature has unfrozen those dollars.

Tahoe drowning victim dressed only in jeans

By Kathryn Reed

The identity of the man found on the bottom of Lake Tahoe in 7 feet of water by a fishing captain could be released today.

A captain with Tahoe Sportfishing in South Lake Tahoe spotted the man who was wearing only jeans just after 7am Thursday. He called his boss John Shearer, who then notified authorities.

It was close to 12:30pm before divers brought the body of the man to shore at Ski Run Marina. The victim is described as Hispanic or Native American, 25-30 years of age, dark brown short hair, 6-feet and 180-200 pounds.

The Tahoe Queen paddle-wheeler had to cancel two of its cruises, as authorities shut down the marina until about 3pm. No watercraft were able to come or go for most of the day.

Employees with the fishing charter company said Thursday night that the Queen had hand prints near the waterline as though the victim may have tried to climb up.

Police would not say if foul play is involved. The El Dorado County Sheriff's Department is expected to perform an autopsy today.

This is the first drowning of the year at Lake Tahoe. There were two in 2008, seven in 2007, nine in 2006 and eight in 2005.

USFS fire lookout may become lodging facility

The Forest Service is looking at the possibility of turning the Grouse Ridge Fire Lookout Tower into a rental facility. A preliminary planning meeting will be Sept. 23 at 5:30pm at the Tahoe National Forest Headquarters in Nevada City.

“The lookout is no longer being used to spot wildfires but it is a favorite amongst recreationists and has tremendous potential as a rental facility. This is the oldest lookout on the forest,” stated Jean Masquelier, Yuba River district ranger, in a press release.

The lookout out has suffered quite a bit of damage over the years, however, the structure is still intact.

“We will need to do fairly extensive repairs to make it habitable again and this is where we need the public’s help. We have absolutely no funding for this project, but hope that with some grants and lots of volunteer help, we can recreate a lookout opportunity for the public,” stated Masquelier.

The first meeting will include an overview of the site, the historic renovation needs and information about the lookout rental process. One of the goals of the renovation is to maintain the historic nature of the facility while still providing some amenities.

“We will be looking for ideas, volunteers, and potential partners at this first meeting and would welcome anyone or representative from any group that might want to be involved,” stated Masquelier.

This will be the third lookout on the TNF to undergo restoration. The first two on the Sierraville Ranger District include Calpine Lookout which has been available for rent for five years and Sardine Lookout which is expected to be available in 2010. The facilities are rented through the National Reservation System for about \$45 per night.

What: Initial Planning Meeting for the Restoration of the Grouse Ridge Lookout

When: Sept. 23 @ 5:30 pm

Where: Tahoe National Forest Headquarters @ 631 Coyote St., Nevada City

Use the employee parking area in the upper parking lot to enter the conference room.

For more information on the Grouse Restoration project, contact Jean Masquelier (530) 288.3231 or (530) 478.6853.

Incline film fest about water issues

Water is the topic of a film festival at Sierra Nevada College in Incline Village starting Sept. 30 with the screening of "FLOW."

The Nevada college along with UC Davis Tahoe Environmental Research Center will also show "Blue Gold: World Water Wars," and "Poisoned Waters."

The movies delve into pollution, privatization and access with a global perspective.

“FLOW” (starts at 6:30pm) is about privatization the world’s fresh water supply. “Charting a Course to Clarity,” a film is about Lake Tahoe’s clarity is being called a bonus feature. It will air after “FLOW.”

“Blue Gold” plays Oct. 14 at 6:30pm. It looks into human causes of the scarcity of water.

“Poisoned Waters” was a PBS documentary which looks at pollution in the Puget Sound and Chesapeake Bay. It will be shown Oct. 28 at 6:30pm.

A Q & A will be conducted after each screening.

Best in Basin deadline today

Today is the last day to submit nominations for Tahoe Regional Planning Agency’s 2009 Best in the Basin awards.

Categories are: new residential, residential modification, rebuild projects, new commercial, commercial modification, commercial rebuild, shorezone, green building, public service, erosion control, restoration, BMP retrofit, defensible space, mixed-use project and green remodel.

Entry forms are at www.trpa.org. Dennis Oliver at (775) 589-5235 or doliver@trpa.org has more info.

Man found floating in Lake Tahoe



People returned to the water at Ski Run Marina late Thursday afternoon after a body was found floating by the Tahoe Queen early in the morning.
Photo/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

A captain of a fishing boat found a man face down early this morning in the shallow water of Lake Tahoe near the Tahoe Queen paddle-wheeler.

The captain called his boss, John Shearer, owner of Tahoe Sportfishing, who then called the South Lake Tahoe Police Department about 7:15am.

“They were backing out and they saw the body,” Shearer

said. "There was no movement. I have no idea who it is. Hopefully, we don't know them."

The local police as of 4:15pm had not identified the man they describe as being between 25 and 30 years old. Nor do they know where the man is from.

It is too early in the investigation to know if foul play was involved.

Ski Run Marina, where the body was found, is in the middle of South Lake Tahoe and is a bevy of activity most days. The marina was shut down until about 3pm. The Tahoe Queen had to cancel its 11am and 2:30pm cruises.

Chris Joyner of South Lake Tahoe had his wakeboarding plans changed. He arrived at the marina about 7:30am to find about nine police cars in the area, and the marina off-limits to watercraft.

He said the body was found near the Queen.

For the fishing boats, they had to dock at Timber Cove when they returned. Captains were retrieved via kayak and customers had to walk back along the beach.

Drowning reported

South Lake Tahoe police are currently at Ski Run Marina on reports of a drowning.

More details as they come in ...

Kahurangi Maori Dance Theater

Check website for exact time. Tahoe Arts Project brings Kahurangi Maori Dance Theater of New Zealand to the South Shore. (530) 542.3632 or tahoeartsproject.org