Group kayak to Emerald Bay Sept. 12

Kayak, fun paddle on Saturday. This is an informal day of paddlers getting together to have an enjoyable day on the water.

When: Sept. 12th, 9am

Where: Baldwin Beach on the South Shore

What: Paddle to Emerald Bay and back

Bring: Kayak, paddle, personal floatation device, lunch, safety gear, water, sunscreen, hat, cash (for parking and tour of Vikingsholm, if you wish).

This is not a Lake Tahoe Water Trail sponsored event.

Fallen Leaf Lake residents up in arms

A full house gathered Sept. 5 at Fallen Leaf Lake to argue about who is going to run the

marina and store



As scenic as the Fallen Leaf Lake is, the community is divided over how things are being operated.

By Susan Wood

FALLEN LEAF LAKE â€“ Tears, cheers, jeers and sneers encapsulated a contentious community meeting last weekend at this normally quiet hamlet that backs up to the Desolation Wilderness near South Lake Tahoe.

At stake for the standing-room-only crowd is the hub of the village – the marina and general store. Long-time, fourth-generation residents John and Ruth Rich have run it for 14 years under the auspices of Fallen Leaf Landing.

Despite the backing of a vocal part of the community, the Rich family has been embroiled in a disagreement since April with the Community Services District board over control of the operation.

The district was formed to represent the interests of the Fallen Leaf Lake Community. The boardâ€™s handling of the concessionaire issue has some wondering if board members should be recalled. Others are in favor of how the board is handling the situation.

The board solicited other vendors to operate the marina and

general store, but only the Rich family responded.

The CSD led by President Dana Clark has suggested the district run the marina and general store if no agreement with the Riches can be reached. But residents wonder how the board thinks it has the time and expertise to do so.

A big issue between the district and the Riches is money. The two sides have wrestled over a contract, but they have not been able to reach common ground. The primary issues that remain are the amount of rent the CSD is expecting and disclosure of accounting practices.

The dual operation brings in $550,000 in annual revenue, while the Rich family pays $90,000 in rent to the district. The CSD board has tried to get more money in a new contract. Negotiations started at $134,000, with the latest figure whittled down to $103,000.

Clark said by phone Monday that the community district needs more money so it can rebuild reserves in case a complete overhaul of the facilities is necessary. He figured at least $500,000 would be needed, adding the district has $170,000 in reserves.

â€œWhat weâ€™re looking for is a partnership with trust on both sides,â€ Clark said. He admitted the issue has divided the community.

When all was said and done the Saturday of Labor Day weekend, the board wrapped up the 3.5-hour meeting by agreeing 5-0 to make one last stab at hashing out a contract by Sept. 19. What happens if those negotiations fail remains to be seen.

The â€œRâ€ word â€“ recall – has come up by a segment of the community, with Betsy Wheeler circulating a petition to demand the board continue to grant concession operations to the Rich family.

â€œThey are the face of Fallen Leaf Lake,â€ said Chuck White, who accused the board of not appreciating the efforts of the Riches.

Plan B for the CSD also involves having a task force help design a CSD-run operation, which would be partly paid for by an endowment. Some in the community doubt the financial soundness of relying on these donations. The board says it has $30,000 in hand for the endowment. Other funds have been pledged, but have not materialized.

Clark is convinced it can get another operator in place with the $170,000 it has in the bank.

Other issues that have surfaced with district board members range from uncompleted maintenance jobs to boat-washing irregularities to the use of the so-called extra room over the general store and the Richesâ€™ overall performance versus its return on investment for the district.

Rich said by phone after the meeting that he hopes the two sides can come to an agreement, although he believes the boardâ€™s problem has been â€œall personalâ€ thus far.

That Saturday, when everyone gave up a glorious Tahoe morning to be indoors bickering, Rich addressed the crowd with his wife by his side. He provided tearful testimony of hard times trying to run the marina and the store while feeling abandoned by the district.

â€œThe board didnâ€™t bail me out then,â€ he said of his economic situation. â€œAnd I donâ€™t think I let the community down.â€

He was greeted with a standing ovation.

After much time, the couple was asked if they would accept a one-year contract designed to place the operators on probation. Ruth Rich declined the temporary offer. Itâ€™s hard

for them to conceive being on probation after operating it all these years.

â€œWe have to get on with the rest of our lives,â€ she said.

John and Ruth Rich will be negotiating with board members Terri Thomas and Mike Kraft.

â€œIâ€™m just grateful weâ€™re moving closer to a solution,â€ resident Debra Barnes said.

Susan Wood is a freelance writer based in South Lake Tahoe. She may be reached at copysue1@yahoo.com.

Construction zone greets STHS students on first day of school

By Kathryn Reed

It felt more like going to a construction site than school for students and staff at South Tahoe High School on the first day of school.

The campus on Sept. 8 looked a whole lot different compared to when everyone left for summer break in June. Building is under way, big equipment is everywhere and the sounds are not the usual quiet of Gardner Mountain.

A senior prank ended up being costly. A couple students put “2010” in chalk and mustard on the new concrete. The oil in the mustard stained the concrete.

“It was almost all cleaned up. The rest will be (today) by Leadership,” student body President David Stewart told the school board Tuesday night.

Steve Morales, district facilities director, said seeing the “prank” was a heart stopper. But, he added, it’s not permanent and they know who did it.

The career tech building that is under construction at the top of Viking Way has taken out a swath of parking places. Not all students have a spot. Those getting first priority are seniors who had good attendance records last year.

Auto shop, construction, architectural design and art will be taught there.

On the other side of campus by the tennis courts is a two-story, 15-room building under construction. Math, environmental science and ROP will be housed there.

Both buildings should be ready for use in the 2010-11 school year.

The tennis courts will be used in the winter to stage equipment. The district promises the courts will be repaired and resurfaced when construction is complete. Look for that to happen in June-July 2010.

Only one play will performed at the school this year because the little theater is likely to be gutted in early 2010.

The district is using part of the $64.5 million bond that voters approved in November 2008 to build the new facilities.

This summer Lake Tahoe Unified School District learned it was awarded a $4 million joint-use grant for STHS. The school will erect a student union and classrooms, while the city of South Lake Tahoe can use the second floor for meeting space.

Lake Tahoe Unified walked away with one-third of the money the

state allocated for joint-use grant dollars. Novemberâ€™s bond had $3.5 million allocated for a one-story building, so the grant allows a larger, multidimensional structure.

The district is at the top of the waiting list for a $10 million interest free bond that is part of the federal stimulus package. Word could come this month if the dollars are rolling to Tahoe. The money would be used as a bridge to keep the construction project on track while the state continues to delay the matching money it owes the district.

“I have no doubt we’ll get funded,” Deb Yates, district CFO, told the board.

The 15-year bond is principal only. The idea is if the feds award LTUSD the bond, it will be paid back with what the state owes the district. Part of the federal criteria is to show the project is ready to go â€“ something the district has no trouble proving.

It would also save taxpayers $35 million in interest payments because it means $10 million less in general obligation bonds.

Word from the state is that $6 million of the $15 million it owes LTUSD in grants could come this month for career tech education.

The first day was less dramatic at other school sites. There were the usual tears from the little ones. It seemed to be a bit of a fashion show at all levels.

Enrollment figures on the first day indicate there will be plenty of students to use the new facilities.

The kindergartners, or class of 2022, total 342 students. Previous kindergarten classes were in the 285 range. Tahoe Valley Elementary will hire another teacher because the numbers are higher than expected.

Overall, elementary enrollment was 1,712 on day one compared

to 1,708 on June 12.

At South Tahoe Middle School, enrollment was expected to drop by 40, but on day one it was down 56. South Tahoe High is expected to lose 30-50 students from last year.

Jim Watson, director of human resources, said he is encouraged by the numbers because usually the district adds students after the first few days.

photos by Kathryn Reed

Parents complain about lack of buses

By Kathryn Reed

Parents filled the Lake Tahoe Unified School District boardroom Sept. 8 to complain about the bus routes taking students living in outlying areas to Bijou Community School.

Liz Muckerman and Heidi Hill Drum spoke on behalf of the parents. Both said they understand the state has cut $200,000 from the district's transportation budget, but they contend the changes from last year to this year are not equitable throughout the district.

Parents have scoured the bus route system to find ways to make it work to bus students enrolled in the two-way immersion program who live in Meyers.

They brought up a lot of information that pointed to the magnet school seeming to get preferential treatment. District officials said that's not the case.

However, board member Larry Green pointed out that the Spanish-English program went from two classes last year to four this, therefore it's likely more students would need to be bused.

Christy Blach, transportation manager, said she used June numbers when it came to making the routes.

She also said ridership is not normal the first couple of weeks as younger students sometimes don't ride the bus right away.

The board agreed 5-0 to have the transportation department work with Bijou parents to try to find a solution.

"I don't feel we got what we wanted. Ideally, the board would have said 'restore a bus to Bijou' or 'ensure more equity is brought into the equation so that Bijou isn't bearing the majority of the budget cuts' or something a little stronger," Drum said after the meeting. "But, we will stay on it until a satisfactory solution can be found. It is not OK that all students who attend the magnet school have the option to ride the bus, but we do not – especially since part of the reason many parents signed up for the immersion program was that transportation would be provided."

Another issue was when parents were notified about the bus routes. Superintendent Jim Tarwater said it was Aug. 11. Drum provided information after the meeting that showed the TWI stops intact in that email.

The parents don't want to add a route; they want to work with the buses that are in service.

Heather Kovac was about to buy two bus passes for her kids but was told her son who's a first-grader at Bijou would have to catch the bus at Magic Pine Tree. The day care center near Barton Memorial Hospital is halfway from her house in Meyers to Bijou, so driving all the way makes more sense to her.

Kovac said her son is devastated to not ride the bus because after watching his older brother ride he was looking forward to it.

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4 survive Truckee plane crash

TRUCKEE – Four people survived a single-engine plane crash Monday night while taking off from the Truckee Tahoe Airport.

The Associated Press is reporting that National Transportation Safety Board officials will arrive today to begin the investigation.

The plane reportedly flipped over and landed upside down.

AP said one person was airlifted to an area hospital, while the other three were taken by ambulance.

It is not known where the the plane, which was made in 1966 and registered to Trolan Enterprises of Missoula, Mont., was headed.

Donate to the Dugard family

Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe has started an account to help Jaycee Lee Dugard's family. Checks may be sent to Bank of the West, Jaycee Dugard Family Fund, 2161 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe, CA 96150. The account number is 186153508.

MontBleu hotel-casino at Stateline has offered its showroom as a fundraising mechanism. Officials are trying to line up a major act that could fill the seats.

Several funds have been posted online. The FBI said it is paying attention to these and cautions people to give to groups they know.

Stateline-to-Stateline bike trail pushing forward

By Kathryn Reed

Connecting Nevada from Stateline on the south to Crystal Bay on the north via a bicycle route is gaining momentum.

Known as the Stateline-to-Stateline route, the roughly 30-mile stretch has demonstration projects that will be built before the core center section. One is in the Incline-Sand Harbor area, the other from Stateline to Round Hill.

As part of the environmental analysis, a scoping session for the southern section is slated for Sept. 10 from 6-8pm at the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency offices; 128 Market St., Stateline.

The northern demo project is lagging behind the southern route a bit. Design of the southern segment is slated for this winter.

The purpose of this 3-mile route, which is proposed to be a 10-foot wide paved path with 2-foot shoulders on both sides, is to link recreation and community facilities with a non-motorized route.

According to the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency and U.S. Forest Service (which are two of the partners in the project), “Separated bicycle facilities are not available along most of the Nevada side of Lake Tahoe. The proposed South Demonstration Project would provide a spectacular recreation opportunity to link the Stateline community and its casino core to public beaches and coves along the picturesque east shore up to Round Hill Pines Beach. Currently, these popular recreation areas are generally accessed by automobile.”

A meeting about the entire route was conducted in mid-summer. Three alternative routes were presented on a series of maps. Those in attendance left comments about what they liked and didn’t like. A mix of land owners, cyclists and those with a general interest showed up to give input.

Some of the obstacles facing trail builders are steep grades and private property.

A cantilever bridge around Cave Rock has been proposed since the get-go. Scott Morgan with Douglas County Parks Department said it would be cheaper to bore another hole into Cave Rock for a 5-foot wide bike lane than to build the bridge. How that section of the route will be navigated is still up for grabs.

The rock is a sacred place for the Washoe Indians, so their input is likely to be great.

Some people mentioned a desire to follow the old Lincoln Highway. Pros and cons of going through Glenbrook were written down. Goshawk concerns were raised.

Comments on the South Shore demo project will be accepted until 5pm Sept. 21. Send them to the above address, attention Melissa Shaw. Project information is at www.nvtahoebikeway.com or, (775) 589.5242, or (530) 543.2762.

South Tahoe’s city attorneys’ jobs on the line today

By Kathryn Reed

One or both of South Lake Tahoe’s city attorneys may be asked to pack up their office after having only been on the job since June.

In a special closed session meeting today at 9am the City Council will meet to evaluate Patrick Enright and Jacqueline Mittelstadt, the two attorneys.

It seems like something regarding the City Attorneys Office comes up at nearly every City Council meeting. Some of the initial problems stemmed from no transition plan being in place when they came on board.

Plus, in the past South Tahoe has always had one city attorney. Mittelstadt was hired as city attorney, and Enright as assistant city attorney/redevelopment counsel. Part of their short time in town has been spent working out of a conference room because their offices were being renovated.

Some of the issues appear to be territorial. City Manager Dave Jinkens has had the authority to hire outside special counsel at his discretion. The council unanimously is trying to curtail that activity – thinking two city attorneys could help in that matter.

Another issue is new employees have their way of doing things, which isn’t necessarily how things have been done in the past. They have rubbed a few department heads the wrong way.

“The City Attorneys Office noted some internal irregularities

in the city and reports of which were not necessarily well received," Mittelstadt said by phone Labor Day weekend. She is hoping for an amicable resolution to the problems. She would not elaborate about the report or the people named in it.

City Council members are being mum about what is going behind closed doors.

Mittelstadt at the Sept. 1 council meeting asked to meet with her five bosses in closed session to discuss personnel issues. They denied her request.

But in an odd twist of circumstances, it was agreed 3-2 to give her a performance evaluation at a special closed session two days later. Mayor Jerry Birdwell and Councilman Bill Crawford were not in favor of that idea.

Usually new employees are reviewed after six months, with annual reviews after that.

Mittelstadt's review was not made public. Birdwell spoke briefly to her after the Sept. 3 meeting. The conversation has not been made public. She will not be at today's meeting because of previous plans to be out of town.

Enright will be there today, though it's unknown if he will be in council chambers during the council's deliberations.

If someone is let go, it will have to be done in open session per state law. Enright and Mittelstadt's contracts say they must be given 90-days notice.

Other business:

Following the closed session, the council has a special budget meeting set for 10am.

No signs in 18 years pointed to Garrido as suspect

Phillip and
Nancy Garrido

By Kathryn Reed

Despite Phillip Garrido's now-well publicized criminal exploits with women, his name was never one that crossed the desks of law enforcement after Jaycee Lee Dugard was abducted June 10, 1991.

"We didn't have anything that was remotely close to these people. These people just did not come up on the radar screen at all, for whatever reason," Lake Tahoe-based FBI agent Chris Campion said of Phillip and Nancy Garrido in a podcast released Aug. 31.

Phillip Garrido, 58, and Nancy Garrido, 54, face 29 felony counts of kidnapping someone under 14 years of age, kidnapping for sexual purposes, forcible rape and forcible lewd acts on a child. The maximum penalty is life imprisonment.

Both pleaded not guilty to all charges.

The Garridos were transferred from the Bay Area on Aug. 27 to the El Dorado County Jail in Placerville. They are being held without bail. They have been under suicide watch.

El Dorado County Superior Court Judge Suzanne Kingsbury will decide if the case is heard in Placerville or South Lake

Tahoe. The Garridos' attorneys could petition for a change in venue.

Phillip Garrido once lived in South Lake Tahoe. This was in the 1970s with his first wife, Christine Perreira Murphy.

In 1976 he was sent to prison for kidnapping Katie Callaway Hall of South Tahoe and raping her in a Reno storage shed. Murphy subsequently divorced him.

Garrido was sent to Leavenworth Federal Penitentiary in Kansas for those crimes. He found religion behind bars, as well as his current wife. Nancy Garrido was at the prison visiting a family member when the romance between them began.

He was paroled in 1988. Sentencing and parole regulations have become stricter in the ensuing years. The couple then made their home in Antioch.

El Dorado County Undersheriff Fred Kollar spent part of the morning of Aug. 27 at that house which is where Dugard apparently lived for the last 18 years. He had an hour to look through the single-story house on the outskirts of Antioch in the East Bay of San Francisco.

After the press conference that afternoon at the county fairgrounds, Kollar said it would have been easy to not know the tent-shed compound existed because of the false back fence.

However, had law enforcement in the Bay Area followed up on neighbors' calls, this case may have been resolved years ago.

A simple search on GoogleEarth also would have told the story in a picture. The makeshift living quarters are clearly visible on the Internet.

Lt. Les Lovell of the El Dorado County Sheriff's Department was one of the original people on the investigation. He had recently finished a stint with the DEA, so the leads he

followed had to do with drugs.

“One lead at the time was a possible drug, white slavery type of connection,”Lovell said. “That was my focus the first couple of months – narcotics related tips.”

He said more than 30 investigators were on the case at one time. Thousands of leads filtered in.

During the 10-year anniversary walk in South Lake Tahoe to remember Dugard, a slew of undercover officers were in the crowd. Past experience has proved that suspects like to return to the scene – even years later.

Authorities questioned one person, but he was let go – and he was not Phillip Garrido.

Campion was also part of the investigation from the get-go. He was unavailable for an in-depth interview. He was one of the more than 2,500 people who walked in a parade of pink through South Lake Tahoe on Sept. 6

“I can say that Terry Probyn, Jaycee’s mom, is very grateful to the South Lake Tahoe community for all their support over the years,” Campion said in an email to *Lake Tahoe News*.

It was Lovell who got the call from the Concord Police Department on Aug. 26 saying they thought they had the now 29-year-old Dugard. Lovell put them in contact with the cold case specialists in Placerville.

From there, the truth started to come out about the last 18 years.

Economy sputters in Lake Tahoe



17th Hole 2009
Celeb Golf
Tourney

By Susan Wood

Businesses and agencies in the two states flanking Lake Tahoe are reporting double-digit declines in lodging, gaming, retail and travel demand.

Lake Tahoe tourism officials say most every commerce indicator points to a struggling economy in the world of tourism for the summer season, which in the basin officially ended Labor Day weekend.

Compared to 2008, bookings as well as lodging tax revenue were down this summer by 10 to 16 percent, the California Travel and Tourism Commission and Nevada Commission on Tourism said. The properties under the wing of the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority were all over the map – with drops ranging from 2 to 30 percent.

Passenger counts and daily departures in June declined by 13 and 21 percent, respectively, in comparison to 2008, the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority reported. (These are the most recent statistics available.) The drops have prompted the transportation agency to turn it into high gear, adding a nonstop flight on Horizon Air between Reno and Mammoth in December. A month later, Southwest Airlines will place another nonstop departure to and from Phoenix on its schedule.

Still, a U.S. Travel Association survey conducted in July found that 63 percent of American adults plan to take at least one leisure trip in the next six months. That's up by 61 percent from last year.

Even though Tahoe is not doing well, other destinations have experienced greater losses. Plus, a few bright spots do exist.

The saving grace for some properties and tourism-related businesses is location, location, location. Lake Tahoe is a weekend's drive from the greater San Francisco area. Sacramento Valley residents can escape the heat for the day.

When the mercury went up in July, the people came up as well. The American Century Championship at Edgewood Tahoe Golf Course brought out 36,000 enthusiasts – a 16 percent jump in attendance over last year.

"We do know that with travelers staying closer to home that our drive markets are still inclined to travel to South Shore, albeit for (fewer) days. So, if we're looking at the glass half full, we have the advantage that our largest market doesn't have to fly to get to us," LTVA Executive Director Carol Chaplin said.

Then there are the bargain hunters, and Tahoe – at about $110 a day – tracks lower in what a family spends on entertainment and lodging than more upscale markets such as Napa, Vail and Monterey.

Perhaps, ironically, the poor economy has answered the cry of those declaring Tahoe shouldn't turn into another Aspen.

The slumping economy driven by an overinflated housing market, plunging employment numbers, faltering investments and free-wheeling corporate business practices have given way to a U.S. travel outlook showing leisure spending off by 11 percent in contrast to 2008, according to the Travel Industry of America Association.

However, the conventional wisdom is if it’s cheap, it’s good to try.

Although international travel to the United States is down, it’s getting less expensive to see the points of interests from one coast to another, according to TIA. Lake Tahoe is no exception.

Tahoe properties have lowered their rates by an average of 10 percent in contrast to previous years.

“People are extremely price sensitive,” said Jerry Bindel of Lakeland Village.

However, there is a delicate balance. The condo property manager, who has served the South Lake Tahoe Lodging Association for years, mentioned a noticeable online pricing error for Lakeland recently that made the phones ring off the hook.

“You can’t bastardize your product. Once you’ve lowered your prices that much, it’s hard for them to come back up,” he said.

He contends hotel properties that fail to offer more than what the visitor received years ago will feel the pain more than others. Little touches and extras go a long way.

Special events bring people

Bindel believes special events that draw people to the area are the name of the game.

The North Shore is all about events. The North Lake Tahoe Resort Association extended its attraction schedule “strike zone” to autumn. One needs simply to turn to Northstar-at-Tahoe – the resort boasted an increase this summer in visitation spawned by recreation with its golf and mountain venues, along with a slew of events.

“Special events are driving the show,” Bindel said. “We need to rethink everything. We used to be able to rest on our laurels. We can’t do that anymore.”

His advice is not limited to private enterprise. Bindel urges the city of South Lake Tahoe to get on the special events bandwagon and either promote itself in these struggling times or make infrastructure improvements that make a difference to visitors scoping out the South Shore.

“Street improvements, lights and sidewalks – they make a physical first impression with the strongest immediate impact,” he said.

The general plan, Tahoe Valley, convention center, Lakeview Commons, Highway 50 – the city has projects in the works to improve the town functionally and aesthetically but most have price tags that could delay them indefinitely. It’s patching the roads, installing streetlights and staging events that Bindel would like to see more of.

“It would behoove the city to encourage it,” he said.

One such example is the return of the Bijou Bash Sept. 12. The party presents a reason for locals to gather with visitors to celebrate South Lake Tahoe.

Some retailers and casinos have also touted the success of investing in the product.

MontBleu Resort & Casino Marketing Manager Mike Donavan noted the property putting money behind renovating its rooms. With Stateline gaming wins down 28 percent this year, casinos are trying to offer more to position themselves.

Phone calls to Harveys-Harrah’s Lake Tahoe spokesman John Packer were unreturned.

Retail centers are in the same boat at the lake. The Ski Run Marina reported shops experiencing a 10 to 15 percent drop in

revenue. Marina owner Mansoor Alyeshmerni has installed a mix of retailers with the intention of adding life to a center undergoing its own renovations and improvements. To attract the bargain conscious, Wildman Coffee moved in with an offering of food from 11 countries under $10.

The Village Center near Stateline has worked to hold its own as well. Shopping center manager Terry Hackett said his retailers have noticed shoppers and diners spending but spending less while looking for less expensive items.

“Retail is down, depending on where you are and who you are. Consumers are still being cautious. The economy won’t come back until we stabilize the housing market and job growth. Families are more likely to go out for pizza than have a sit down dinner,” he said.

Still, signs of life show better cash receipts now than six months ago, Hackett added. And he’s convinced the tenant mix has helped keep the shoppers interested.

On the other side of town, Pearl Izumi in the Factory Stores at the â€œYâ€ may represent an island of progress amid a terrain of boarded-up storefronts and dwindling shoppers on crumbling sidewalks.

Manager Lauren Lindley said the shop this summer has been “holding steady” since it opened five years ago. She thinks the specialty store, with its own recreation garments, would be dead if it “relied on mall walkers.”

She’s got her eye on what the future brings in winter, which presented more of a concern last year.

“It was so bad, but I feel there’s nowhere to go but up,” she said.

The National Retail Federation, the world’s largest retail trade association, reported July sales had decreased 5 percent

compared to last year.

As for the collective business outlook for the South Shore, Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce B Gorman was unavailable for comment.