USFS, Heavenly offer chance to ski with a ranger

The U.S. Forest Service Lake Tahoe Basin Management Unit's Ski with a Ranger at Heavenly Mountain Resort begins Jan. 17.

Tours begin at the top of the gondola at 10am and 1pm every Monday and Friday. Spanish Ski with a Ranger returns March 7 with tours every Friday at 10:30am. Both programs are about one hour. They will continue through April 11, weather permitting.

Participants must be at least intermediate level skiers-boarders and provide their own lift ticket. No reservations are required; attendance is on a first-come, first-served basis.

For more info, contact Megan Dee at (530) 543.2618 or mldee@fs.fed.us or Joy Barney at (530) 543.2685 or jbarney@fs.fed.us.

Prescribed fire scheduled for Tahoe City

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will begin prescribed fire operations off of Bunker Drive near Tahoe City on Jan. 9.

Crews will burn approximately 1 to 5 acres per day, weather permitting. In addition, crews continue to burn piles near South Lake Tahoe on Luther Pass. Both operations may continue through the weekend, as weather and conditions allow.

Smoke from these prescribed fire project areas can be expected, is normal, and may continue for several days after the initial ignition. All prescribed fires are monitored regularly for burning and smoke dispersal and action is taken to mitigate concerns as they arise. For more information on prescribed fire and smoke management tips, go online.

Drought declaration for Calif. expected



More sand than water is currently under the Tahoe Keys Pier. Photo/Kathryn reed

By Matt Weiser, Sacramento Bee

The California Department of Water Resources is planning to draft an emergency drought declaration for Gov. Jerry Brown's consideration as dry winter conditions continue.

DWR Director Mark Cowin told the California Board of Food and Agriculture at a meeting Tuesday that his agency is weighing

whether to present the governor with a drought declaration. Spokeswoman Nancy Foley said that declaration could be forthcoming “within a couple weeks.”

“We will likely, given the circumstances, make a recommendation for a drought declaration,” Foley said. “The snow survey last Friday was so dismal and there doesn’t seem to be any storms on the horizon, so it just seems we’ve got to start preparing a drought declaration.”

Read the whole story

Former Tahoe Olympians to gather

In honor of Olympic Heritage Celebration Week (Jan. 11-19) the Cedar House Pub at Granlibakken in Tahoe City is hosting the Nordic Legends Dinner on Jan. 17.

The guest speaker will be Joe Pete Wilson. Wilson was part of the 1960 U.S. four-man bobsled team that won bronze at the Winter Olympics at Squaw Valley.

The evening will feature Olympic athletes from around Tahoe who will discuss the history of Nordic skiing and the Olympics.

Cedar House Pub will donate 50 percent of the evening’s profits to the Sierra State Parks Olympic Snow Trail Restoration efforts.

Music begins at 5:30pm, dinner at 6pm and speakers at 7pm. Cost is $35. Call (530) 581.7582 or email madelineross@granlibakken.com to RSVP.

Money available for recreation in Nevada

Nevada Division of State Parks has approximately $1.2 million in grant funds from the Recreational Trails Program of the Federal Highway Administration to hand out.

Applications are due March 7 by 5pm. Federal, state, city and county governments, special governmental districts, trail organizations and private individuals are potentially eligible for the grants.

The 2014 Grants Manual and application packages are available online.

For further information or questions, contact Jenny Scanland at (775) 684.2787 or jscanland@parks.state.nv.gov.

Tahoe sculptor to give talk

David Foster, international artist and sculptor will share via slide show his life in the little Tuscan town of Pietrasanta, Italy.

This is where he selects his marble directly from the quarry for his carvings.

Foster taught at Lake Tahoe Community College for 32 years.

The Jan. 12 5pm event is free at Hope Lutheran Church, 930 Julie Lane, South Lake Tahoe.

El Dorado forced to alter sex offender law

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County Board of Supervisors on a 3-0 vote Tuesday repealed the sex offender ordinance that was created with Phillip Garrido in mind.

Garrido and his wife, Nancy, were sentenced in 2011 to spend the rest of their lives behind bars for the 1991 kidnapping of then 11-year-old Jaycee Lee Dugard from a bus stop in Meyers and then holding her captive 18 years in a shack and raping her at will.

A 48-year-old registered sex offender last year challenged the constitutionality of the ordinance in federal court, saying it was too restrictive. The 2012 ordinance limited sex offenders from being within 300 feet of a park, school, public pool, library or playground.



Phillip and Nancy Garrido's abduction of Jaycee Lee Dugard has changed sex offender laws.

El Dorado County District Attorney Vern Pierson said his office believes the judge was sympathetic to the plaintiff and therefore he is willing to rewrite the ordinance to comply.

"We tried to put a buffer between certain sex offenders and parks and kids," Pierson told *Lake Tahoe News*.

One of the issues raised by the sex offender, who in court documents is called John Doe, is that he would not be allowed to go to a fast food establishment that has a playground because there would be children there.

"You are right. I don't want you in close proximity to children. I'm sorry that is an inconvenience for you," Pierson said in response to that challenge.

Before the county begins amending the ordinance it will wait for a decision out of Southern California related to where sex offenders are allowed to be. A decision is expected within a month. Pierson hopes to have something before the supervisors within 60 days.

At the Jan. 7 meeting Supervisor Norma Santiago was absent and Supervisor Ray Nutting did not participate in the vote. The ordinance will be void in 30 days.

South Lake Tahoe and Placerville have adopted similar ordinances that would be subject to the same challenge. However, the county ordinance only affects unincorporated areas of the county.

Pierson said he plans to talk to officials in both cities once the county ordinance is redrafted and the ruling from Southern California comes out. South Lake Tahoe hasn't bothered to start revising its ordinance even though it knows it will have to. City Attorney Tom Watson said he would review the federal case and present the City Council with options, but he didn't say when or what those options might be.

"Our law has the same issue that is present in the county's law. In my estimation, most of the time there are provisions that allow the parts of the laws that are deemed unconstitutional to remain unenforced but the other parts remain in effect. I would support an update to the law as opposed to repealing," South Lake Tahoe Police Chief Brian Uhler told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Opinion: Liberty explains convenience fee

By Janine Irwin-Webb

As Liberty Utilities' senior manager of customer care, I appreciate the opportunity to address some of the understandable concerns and frustrations our customers may have over the newly implemented third-party convenience fee for online payments.

Liberty Utilities is a privately owned utility, but regulated

by the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC). The CPUC reviews all of the utilities' expenses and sets the rates charged to its customers. Consistent with utility practices across the country, the CPUC allows Liberty to assess the convenience fee paid to a third-party vendor for processing certain forms of payment. When Liberty Utilities began operations in January 2011 the existing rate tariff allowed the utility to assess this fee, but Liberty only began collecting it effective Dec. 4, 2013. It should be noted that NV Energy uses the same third-party payment administrator and charges a convenience fee similar to Liberty's.

The $3.50 convenience fee is applicable only to payments made that require the services of Liberty's third-party administrator. These payments include any online payment involving a credit card or the one-time use of a debit card or electronic check. If a customer wants to make a payment over the phone using a credit card or a one-time use of a debit card or electronic check, this also requires the services of the third-party administrator since our customer service representative goes online to make this payment on the customer's behalf. The fee goes directly to the third-party vendor, and Liberty does not profit in any way from it.

Liberty recognizes that credit card payments and one-time debit or electronic check payments may be desirable to customers who are willing to pay for the convenience of this option. We also recognize that other customers may not want to pay for the on-line processing of their payment, so we continue to offer payment options that do not involve a third-party administrator.

There is no convenience charge for a customer who sets up automatic checking account deductions, pays by mail with a paper check, or pays in person with either cash or a paper check at one of our two locations. To further customize their payment option, customers can enroll in our Equal Payment Plan and/or select their payment due date. All these options can be

found on our website.

Although we informed our customers about the implementation of the convenience fee several months earlier via statements on their bills and information on our website, we appreciate customers' input that we need to clarify the reason for this charge. We have made some changes to our website noting the fee is charged by a third-party administrator as well as noting other payment options.

At Liberty Utilities we understand that one size doesn't fit all, so we hope that these multiple ways to make your utility payment provides you with options that make your life easier. Please visit our website or call one of our customer service representations at 800.782.2506 if you'd like more assistance.

Janine Irwin-Webb is senior manager of customer care at Liberty Utilities.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Après Wine Co. in South Lake Tahoe celebrated its fifth anniversary on New Year's Eve.

• The Bay Area is one of the top 10 metro areas in the U.S. for Burton. That's why the sporting good company just opened flagship stores in Berkeley and San Francisco. It proves why Lake Tahoe depends on that drive-up market.

• Wells Fargo inside Raley's at Y in South Lake Tahoe is

planning to move to the old Sports Ltd. spot in the same center.

• Royal Gorge will temporarily close its cross country ski trails beginning on Jan. 8 due to a lack of snow.

• Lake Tahoe's California Assemblyman Frank Bigelow, R-O'Neals, was named vice chair of the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

Reward offered in serial burglary case

A $1,000 reward is being offered by Washoe County Secret Witness for information leading to the arrest and prosecution of the person or people responsible for a series of residential burglaries in Incline Village.

The Incline burglaries started in November and have occurred other places around the lake. The suspects have used similar methods in the 18 thefts to lead authorities to believe the same person or people are involved.

Two possible suspects were seen leaving a burgled residence. They are described as a white man and woman in their 20s, wearing black ski outfits and driving a gold Lexus.

Anyone with information should call Washoe County Sheriff's Office at (775) 328.3320 or Secret Witness at (775) 322.4900.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report