Sierra transforms base area into event venue



The new structure on the left, which has a restaurant and retail, will open in mid-January. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Susan Wood

TWIN BRIDGES – Snowboarders aren't the only ones sitting on their bottoms enjoying all that the slopes of Sierra-at-Tahoe have to offer.

The South Shore-area ski resort located 12 miles west of Meyers has kicked off the 2013-14 season with a new twist and turn – a major $5 million overhaul to its base lodge area that includes a plaza, new eatery and associated amenities designed to accommodate hanging out.

The resort started construction as soon as the last season ended.

“The mountain is incredible. We don’t want to change the mountain. We just wanted to do something that would enhance the overall ski and riding experience,” Sierra-at-Tahoe spokesman Steve Hemphill said, as he strolled through a massive expanse of paving stones now covering the area outside the main base lodge.



Richard Baker works on the Solstice restaurant at Sierra.

No longer should seating be an issue.

Two fire pits, a structure for an informational sign, lighting, fencing and a 9,000-square-foot building mark an area that used to be covered in dirt or snow. The improvements have greatly increased the number of seats available for those who don’t want to leave the ski area after playing on the slopes and for those who just want to people-watch or wait for others.

Sierra-at-Tahoe, still run under the management of Booth Creek Holdings, wants to expand into new markets – weddings, concerts and events. Three concerts that could simulate the Live at Lakeview series at South Lake Tahoe’s El Dorado Beach are planned in March in cooperation with Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and OnCourse Events.

Also look for the plaza to be turned into a massive venue for a corn-hole tournament.

And when the Cal Band from Berkeley arrives for its annual pilgrimage to Sierra-at-Tahoe on Jan. 19 during the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday it will have a suitable place to stand and perform. This is the same weekend the new food-retail outlet on the plaza is set to open.

Events and parties represent part of the missing elements Sierra-at-Tahoe has wanted to capitalize on for years, but didn't have the full monetary resources to pull it off. When it ran Northstar, Booth Creek tended to pile the money into improvements to the north before Vail Resorts took over the Truckee-area ski area.

Sierra wanted a little breathing room inside and out of its base area where 90 percent of its visitors pass through. Getting in on the act, the Aspen Café and Mama's Kitchen in the base lodge were also opened up to accommodate more seating. Charging areas have been added for people who need to stay connected or do some work while at the resort.

"It's a vast improvement. This will be the après ski experience we've never had," Hemphill told *Lake Tahoe News*. "When you pay $84 (for a lift ticket), you expect certain things. That's how the Vails of the world do a great job."

However, Sierra isn't anything like Vail – and doesn't want to be. Within minutes of discussing how the improvements are a result of guest surveys, Hemphill confirmed the ski resort would not be the type of resort to put in hotel. That's not its style. But Sierra wouldn't mind if guests stayed after 4pm.



Paving stones are in the plaza, above the 14-foot wall, as well as in front of the ski rental area.

With chairlift technology constantly evolving, new lifts are in the master plan it shares with the landlord, the U.S. Forest Service. But lifts won't be in new locations. A mountain bike park is not likely, but adventure races are.

So how does a small ski resort compete with the high-dollar, fancier ski areas of the world when they're constantly adding new venues or improvements?

"We compete with the big guns by sticking to our guns. We're not looking to compete. We're just giving (people) the product they expect and enhanced it," Hemphill said.

The new restaurant will be called Solstice. It's designed to appeal to guests wanting healthier options and more local representation. These include the Hope Valley Café near Pickett's Junction and Jack Russell Brewery near Placerville, along with other wine-tasting options in the El Dorado County region. There will be seating inside and out of Solstice, and a bar outside. The retail space of the structure, which took much negotiation with the county building department to nail down, will feature the ski area's partners to provide them with more marketing offerings.

The new place is a Sprung design that's similar to an airport

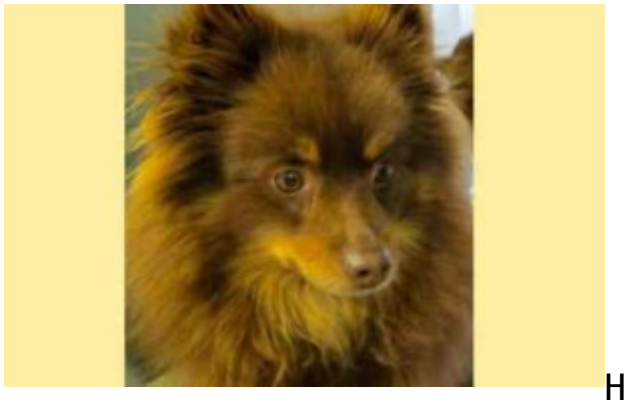
hangar. It’s similar to the one at the West Bowl, only larger. This is where the last, large-scale improvement was made at Sierra for the 2003-04 season.

The plaza took out the shack for ski waxing and storage and moved the features to a tent on the lower level.

Long-term goals have the ski area eyeing improvements to its children’s ski school. After all, skiers and riders who grew up skiing this mountain have known greatness. Who can forget the two Travis’s skiing the slopes – Cabral and Ramos. Now all one has to do is look at the cast of young Olympians aiming for a shot at a gold medal. Some have already achieved it. Take snowboarding gold-medalist Hannah Teter who calls Sierra her host mountain near her Meyers home. Now there’s Jamie Anderson and Maddie Bowman likely on their way to Olympic stardom.

The resort hopes to erect a jumbo screen on the plaza during the Olympics in February so people can watch Sierra’s stars in action.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Herschel is one of six Pomeranians

that were transferred to our shelter from the Central Valley this past weekend to find their new homes at Tahoe.

There are four females and two males. Three are brown or tan and the other three are black. All are very sweet and playful, about 1 or 2 years old, and a few are a little more shy than the others.

Herschel is about 18 months old, outgoing and affectionate. Herschel is neutered, microchipped, and vaccinated.

He is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes.

Go online to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information on adopting a pet.

For spay-neuter assistance for South Tahoe residents, go online.

– Karen Kuentz

Letter: Liberty Utilities must rethink its project

To the community,

CalPeco Utility line upgrade – why should the basin ratepayers be responsible?

The inconvenient truth is that this project was proposed and

an initial environmental analysis was undertaken by Nevada Energy in 2010 with a customer base of over 2 million. CalPeco/Liberty Utilities then purchased a smaller market share of customers which is approximately 49,000. CalPeco found it easier and of course cheaper to piggy-back off the NV Energy enviro documentation. Why reinvent the wheel?

The EIR documentation should include a couple more alternatives that don't require an entire looping system. The number of customers and economics of this project must be a factor and additional alternatives be proposed for different independent loop options, and an option for no upgrade to the basin line segments which could minimize or eliminate rate hikes of up to 30 percent for all basin ratepayers. This is a significant impact to the ratepayer.

The environmental documentation must provide a breakdown and needs assessment for the proposed expansions of Northstar and Squaw along with Homewood Mountain needs. And provide a separate needs assessment for the regulated growth needs of the Tahoe basin portion of the project.

There are many other issues that need to be raised:

Noise:

CalPeco will provide notification of construction to all properties owners 300 feet of project and post a phone number within 1,000 feet of residences for disturbances. The flight path of helicopters is a much larger area than just the construction sites and will generate noise levels that could exceed CNEL as could blasting activities which will be heard up to a couple of miles from actual blasting site. CalPeco should, at a minimum, post proposed activities and expected hours of operations on their website and post in all local newspapers a minimum of one week before construction, blasting, etc., activities schedules. Construction activities will occur 8am-6:30pm in TRPA jurisdiction, 6am-8pm and

8aa-8pm weekends in Placer County with certain exceptions for nighttime activities that are required.

Habitat disturbance:

From CalPeco EIR: 4.7.2 Disturbance or loss of sensitive habitats (jurisdictional wetlands, riparian vegetation, and SEZ). Implementing the action alternatives would result in direct removal and disturbance of sensitive habitats, including waters of the United States, waters of the state, riparian habitat and SEZs. Mitigation Measure 4.7-2a Compensate for unavoidable Loss of Stream and Riparian Habitat.

CalPeco shall compensate for permanent riparian habitat impacts at a minimum of a 1:1 ratio through contributions to a CDFW approved wetland mitigation bank …. This does not correct the damage done. Mitigation Banks do not correct the onsite destruction or loss of habitat. The mitigation bank contribution must mitigate within the Tahoe basin.

Northern goshawk habitat, PACs, and TRPA disturbance zones, overall, implementation of Alternative 4 (Proposed Alternative) would initially result in the permanent loss or disturbance of up to 72.6 acres of potential habitat for northern goshawk over the study area. TRPA code prohibits this disturbance: TRPA Code 62.4.1. Disturbance Zones – Perching sites and nesting trees of goshawks, peregrines, eagles, and osprey as shown on the TRPA Regional Plan Overlay Maps shall not be physically disturbed in any manner nor shall the habitat in the disturbance zone be manipulated in any manner unless such manipulation is necessary to enhance the quality of the habitat. The threshold shall apply not only to the number of known population sites but also to the disturbance and influence zone buffers to sites found in the future.

Ellie Waller, Tahoe Vista resident and Liberty Utilities customer

Anderson 7th despite falling in slopestyle at Copper

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. -– Sixteen-year-old Ty Walker (Stowe, Vt.) landed the top spot for the United States with her fourth-place finish in the Paul Mitchell Slopestyle at the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix.

The international field put down runs with confidence at Sunday's FIS World Cup with Czech rider Sarka Pancochova taking the victory and Isabel Derungs and Elena Koenz of Switzerland taking second and third.

Walker's top-four result fulfilled her objective criteria for Olympic qualification, and her top finish over the Americans moved her up in the standings behind Jamie Anderson (South Lake Tahoe), who fell during both of her runs Sunday and finished seventh.

Anderson is the only other rider who has met the top-four criteria after her victory at the Dew Tour iON Mountain Championships last weekend at Breckenridge.

Jessika Jenson (Rigby, Idaho) was the only other American rider in the final, finishing eighth.

Overall the course was running a little bit slow due to the new snow and cold, dry Colorado weather. Increasing winds in the second round also threw off many riders during the jumps.

Letter: LTUSD, Barton partner for healthy kids

To the community,

Congratulations to the 567 students from Lake Tahoe Unified School District who participated in Barton Health's sixth annual We Can program. We Can, which stands for Ways to Enhance Children's Activity and Nutrition, is a seven-week program designed for 4th- and 5th-graders that encourages healthy eating habits, activity, exercise, and overall wellness.

We Can is a national program that is implemented locally by Barton Health and the school district's physical education teachers.

Each week students faced a new wellness challenge. Examples included drinking two 8-ounce glasses of water daily, exercising 30 to 60 minutes per a day, consuming less than two hours of television or video games each day, and avoiding soda and sugar-filled drinks. Each student that completed a challenge was awarded a raffle ticket. The raffle included "active" prizes, such as hula hoops, basketballs, soccer balls, razor scooters and the grand prize – a bicycle from Kmart.

We want to thank and acknowledge the community businesses that supported this year's We Can program. Big 5 donated gift cards, the Kmart Cares program donated toward prizes, and both the Reno Aces and University of Nevada's Wolf Pack provided game tickets. The Public Health Institute kindly supplied reusable water bottles for every participant.

A big kudos to the Lake Tahoe Unified School District's physical education teachers for helping us implement this seven-week program and for encouraging and supporting another group of We Can alumni.

Leanne Wagoner, community outreach coordinator for Barton Health

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Highest paid Placer County employee retiring

By Ed Fletcher and Phillip Reese, Sacramento Bee

Placer County's Dr. Richard Burton was the region's highest paid public official in 2012, earning nearly $340,000. Throw in his benefits, and his total compensation reached nearly $460,000.

Burton wasn't doing just one job, according to Nancy Nittler, the county's personnel director. He had two key Placer County posts as public health officer and director of the Health and Human Services Department. After seven years in the health officer post, he added the HHS director title when the previous director left a decade ago.

The Placer County doctor is one of 22 city and county employees in the Sacramento region who earned more than $250,000 in total pay last year, according to a *Sacramento Bee* review of data from the State Controller's Office.

Read the whole story

White finishes third in slopestyle at Copper

By USSA

COPPER MOUNTAIN, Colo. -– Two-time Olympic gold medalist Shaun White, who rides for Northstar, made a big leap toward Sochi on Sunday with his third-place finish at the Paul Mitchell Slopestyle at the Sprint U.S. Grand Prix.

White's top-four result fulfilled the objective criteria for Olympic qualification as well as gave him the highest U.S. result so far in the five-event qualification series, putting him in a solid position going into the three remaining events.

The stacked field of international talent made for a progressive competition, especially the Norwegians, who went one-two with winner Staale Sandbech stomping an incredible cab 1440 and scoring a 97.00. The fight for the first-ever Olympic slopestyle team will only get more competitive when the Sprint Grand Prix Tour moves to Breckenridge Jan. 8-11.

Chas Guldemond (Reno) was hoping to improve his first run score of 88.5, but went down in his second run and landed fifth for the second time in two events. He still sits on top of the standings, but only has three more chances to secure a top-four result.

Overall the course was running a bit slow due to the new snow and cold, dry Colorado weather. Increasing winds in the second round also threw off many riders during the jumps.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Paul Middlebrook has left KTHO radio and is now employed by KRLT.

• This is a powerful (albeit incredibly long) story about the rising incidence of brain injury in athletes such as skiers and mountain bikers.

• Ty Cobb's hunting and fishing retreat at Lake Tahoe has an asking pricing of $6.5 million.

• The January-February issue of *Via* magazine has a blurb about the Nevada Museum of Art, including a picture of a Phyllis Shafer painting. Shafer runs the art department at Lake Tahoe Community College.

• This video is from South Tahoe High School's VTV. In part it talks about the drug Molly:

Placer County spending money on Tahoe projects

Placer County Board of Supervisors this month approved a slew of funding proposals that impact Lake Tahoe.

Money comes the hotel tax the county collects on the North Shore.

Here are the projects:

North Tahoe Public Art: The funding will be for initial construction costs as part of the Kings Beach Commercial Core Improvement Project. Part of the funding will be for footings and utilities in the two roundabouts and part will be used with private donations for the first public art installation, which is expected in 2014. The remaining funding will be used for installation of a second piece of art.

Regional Transit System Branding: Currently there are multiple transit agencies that provide service in the region, which has created brand clutter and confusion among riders. The branding project will devise a single, coordinated brand for the North Lake Tahoe-Truckee region transit systems, creating a clear and identifiable brand that ties all systems together.

An identifiable logo will be created.

North Lake Tahoe Water Shuttle: This three-year pilot project will enter its third year next summer. The funding will assist with the operation of the shuttle which links four points on the Lake Tahoe North Shore, including Homewood, Tahoe City, Carnelian Bay and Tahoe Vista. It is envisioned that this short-trip water shuttle system will ultimately link into the larger North Shore-South Shore ferry system, which is currently being planned, but is not expected to be implemented for several years.

Performing Arts Center Feasibility Studies: This funding is for an initial feasibility study and business plan for cultural arts facilities in the region. Vail Resorts is talking about a regional performing arts hall and amphitheater at Northstar.

Dollar Creek Shared Use Trail/SR 89 Community

Revitalization/Fanny Bridge Project: The funding will provide a portion of the local match needed to access more than $25 million in federal grant dollars. Funding would go to design and construction of the Dollar Creek Shared Use Trail and the Fanny Bridge Replacement Project.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Time ticking to sign up for health care

By Tracy Seipel, San Jose Mercury News

Lynn Engelman still has no idea whether her doctors in Contra Costa County will be on her new health care plan – and neither, she says, do her doctors.

Capitola resident Kathryn Johnson has already paid the first month's bill for her new policy through the state's new health insurance exchange, but she just received a letter telling her she hasn't signed up for a plan.

And in San Leandro, Linda Entrikin is one of 900,000 Californians suffering from whiplash after the Obama administration's surprise announcement Thursday that people whose insurance plans have been canceled can replace them with cheap, bare-bones plans after all.

For tens of thousands of Californians still without health insurance, Monday's deadline to enroll under the president's new health law feels like an exercise of hurry up and wait. And across the country, government health exchanges are bracing for an avalanche of applications from people who must

sign up by end of day Monday if they want coverage to begin Jan. 1.

Read the whole story