National Winter Trails Day hikes in SLT, Truckee

Tahoe Rim Trail Association will celebrate National Winter Trails Day in Truckee and South Lake Tahoe.

TRTA is partnering with REI on Jan. 11 from 11am-3pm for a family friendly event at Tahoe Donner XC Ski Center, 15275 Alder Creek Road, Truckee.

Register online.

There will be hike on the South Shore with Explore Tahoe through Van Sickle Bi-State Park.

Register online.

In-house suspensions at STHS a possibility

By Kathryn Reed

Students at South Tahoe High School who are caught with or under the influence of drugs, including alcohol, get what amounts to a three-day vacation from school. That could change.

In the past the school had a diversion program where students would get counseling as part of the process. With cutbacks in recent years, the school has lost two counselors, a community outreach person who was bilingual, a clerk who made calls to see why kids weren’t at school and a full-time person for the

high school who handled the School Attendance Review Board.

To date for this school year, there have been 27 alcohol or drug offenses at the school. Nine of those were committed by the same three people. Five were alcohol related and committed at the same time.



South Tahoe police Officer Aaron Crawford, left, and South Tahoe High Vice Principal Dennis Sarosik talk Dec. 9 about student drug use. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Freshmen or sophomores usually commit the infractions. After a while the kids figure out it’s not a good idea to be bringing drugs to school.

“Alcohol is not the drug of choice, it’s marijuana,” Dennis Sarosik, STHS vice principal, said.

South Tahoe police Officer Aaron Crawford is the school resource officer. He patrols the grounds along with a probation officer.

“It’s easy access here at the lake. It’s easier to get than alcohol,” Crawford said of marijuana.

It’s so pervasive that South Lake Tahoe is known as a “green community” and that has nothing to do with the environment.

Sarosik and Crawford were at the Dec. 9 South Tahoe Drug Free Coalition meeting to talk about what happens to students who are caught with drugs and listen to ideas from coalition members.

The first infraction a student is suspended for three days; the second comes with a five-day suspension. Alternative education is the next course of action. Referrals to Tahoe Youth & Family Services are also given, but are not mandatory.

Athletes face other consequences per NIAA regulations.

The coalition is working on devising a program where students will serve suspensions at the school.

STHS used to have a diversion program. It is part counseling – which could be individual, group and/or family; criminal justice (this piece is all that exists today); and school support.

The latter is important because so many of the multiple offenders are also failing more than one subject.

“There is a need for academic support. We need someone there to manage it,” Sarosik said.

Sarosik said the school would be open to resurrecting the diversion program, but it does not have the manpower to make it happen.

Hector Reyes, supervising health education coordinator with El Dorado County, said his department and others in the community could provide the counseling piece. Tahoe Turning Point and TY&FS also have drug and alcohol counselors on staff.

Lake Tahoe Unified School District does not have a drug-testing program, unlike its neighbor Douglas County School District. DCSD started the program in 2009-10 for students who participate in athletics and other extra curricular activities.

Sarosik said cost is a prohibiting factor to drug testing, as well as that it is hard to test for synthetics. However, it was pointed out that Tahoe Turning Point tests for drugs onsite at a cost of $15.

STHS does use a breathalyzer at dances on everyone coming and going.

“It’s changed the character of dances. There’s no more projectile vomit or people passing out,” Sarosik said.

But it’s not just high school students using. Crawford said the number of marijuana infractions this year is increasing at South Tahoe Middle School. Every year there are a couple elementary students who are high or are possessing drugs.

Here are some stats from 2011-12 regarding drug use at STMS, STHS and Mt. Tallac high.

The goal is for coalition members to research other diversion programs, for drug counselors to devise a way to provide STHS help, and for the school to figure out what it would need to make it all work.

Editorial: California water debate going nowhere

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the Nov. 22, 2013, San Jose Mercury News.***

California is having the wrong debate about the future of one of its most valuable assets, the Sacramento-San Joaquin River

Delta, which produces water for much of the state and about half of Silicon Valley.

The battle for the better part of the last two years has been about how big a new conveyance system – probably tunnels – should be, how much it should cost, and who should foot the bill. The result has been a political fight of the worst kind, pitting Northern Californians against Southern Californians and agriculture interests against environmentalists in a battle royal. At its worst, this could be one of the biggest water grabs in state history. And for California, that's saying something.

The focus instead should be the operating conditions for the Delta, particularly the amount of water that needs to flow through it annually to maintain the health of the estuary. Once that standard has been established, then everything else will fall into place for the two coequal goals of providing a more reliable water supply and protecting, restoring and improving the Delta ecosystem. Before deciding on tunnels, helicopters, whatever, state water officials need to determine how much water can be expected to be delivered. That will drive how it's allocated and how it should be conveyed.

Why has the debate focused on the conveyance system instead of this basic question? Follow the money.

Read the whole story

Vail reports $73.4 mil.

quarterly loss

By Jason Blevins, Denver Post

Vail Resorts lost $73.4 million in the first quarter of fiscal 2014, compared to $60.6 million for the same period last year.

The resort company typically loses big in the August-through-October first quarter, when it ramps up for the ski season without actually hosting skiers.

Vail Resort chief Rob Katz said in a statement that the net loss was expected and was higher than last year due to expenses from its acquisition of Utah's Canyons ski area and two urban ski areas outside Minneapolis and Detroit. Those acquisitions in the last year generated $7.6 million in net losses, including $2.7 million for "integration and litigation related costs," according to the company's earnings statement.

Sales of the Epic Pass through Dec. 7 were up 13 percent, with dollar volume up 16 percent over the same early season last year.

Read the whole story

Wine collecting more profitable than stock market

By Walter Hamilton, Los Angeles Times

When Ken Bleifer started collecting wine 50 years ago, he didn't think of it as an investment.

He simply loved wine and, like many connoisseurs, ended up buying much more than he could ever drink. So about 10 years ago, he began selling a portion of the 4,000 bottles stashed in his wine cellar.

Bleifer, a Venice nephrologist, unloaded a few cases at a time. Two bottles of Burgundy purchased for $80 in 1983 fetched $4,700 in 2006.

Bleifer won't disclose his total profit other than to estimate it at several hundred thousand dollars.

Read the whole story

Special interests to take their cause to voters in '14

By Anthony York, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO – While much of the country is gearing up for the holidays, political forces in Sacramento are girding for battle.

Already, special interests are lined up with plans that could shape next year's general election ballot. They are considering propositions to increase medical malpractice awards, hike tobacco taxes and give local governments the right to scale back public employee pensions, among other ideas.

Each of the proposals could spawn campaigns costing tens of millions of dollars. Decisions about whether to proceed will be made in the next couple of weeks as de facto deadlines loom.

Some propositions have already qualified for the November ballot. One would allow the state insurance commissioner to veto proposed increases in healthcare premiums, as he now can with auto policies. Another is a referendum on a new Central Valley casino project approved by Gov. Jerry Brown this year.

Votes are also scheduled on a multibillion-dollar water bond and a limit on state spending. But those measures were placed on the ballot by the Legislature and could change, because lawmakers are not bound by the same rules or deadlines as initiative sponsors.

Read the whole story

USFS to set controlled burn near Luther Pass

U.S. Forest Service fuels management crews will begin prescribed fire operations off Highway 89 near Luther Pass on Dec. 10.

Crews will begin burning a 29-acre unit across the highway from the Luther Pass overflow campground and will burn as much as weather and conditions allow. Operations may continue through the week.

Smoke from this prescribed fire project area can be expected, is normal, and may continue for several days after the initial ignition. Smoke may be visible on Highway 89.

All prescribed fires are monitored regularly for burning and smoke dispersal and action is taken to mitigate concerns as they arise.

Forest Service staff will post road signs around the areas affected by the prescribed fire, send email notifications, and update the local fire information line at (530) 543.2600, ext. 6. To receive prescribed fire notifications, send an email to pa_ltbmu@fs.fed.us.

Fake vs. real Christmas trees

By Bruce Barcott and Michelle Lau, Sunset

When I was a child, my family adhered to a strict policy when it came to Christmas trees: We never drew from the same well twice. One year, we rolled up to the White Front parking lot in Everett, Washington, where my dad haggled with the schnapps-warmed proprietor over the price of a 6-foot fir.

In a better winter, we tramped into an Alaskan forest, axe in father's hand. During our California years, my sister and I pitched in to assemble our wire-and-plastic tree, working it like a big Tinkertoy set.

The ease with which this long-dead lumber is recalled speaks to its power. Holidays come and go, but Christmas trees stand in memory's warehouse forever. Now, with two kids of our own, my family is all about the adventure of finding the perfect real tree. We've cut our own at a farm and carted it by boat and ferry from the San Juan Islands to our home in Seattle.

But not everyone does. My mother, she's out of the real-tree game.

Read the whole story

Douglas County judge charged with manslaughter

By AP

MINDEN – A Nevada judge has been charged with misdemeanor vehicular manslaughter in the August death of a bicyclist.

A criminal complaint filed Friday says Douglas County District Judge Michael Gibbons failed to exercise due care when passing bicyclist Joseph Longo, 61, of Gardnerville.



Michael Gibbons

Longo and Gibbons were westbound on Pinenut Road on Aug. 20, and Gibbons was making a right turn onto East Valley Road when the rear of his vehicle struck the bike, according to the Nevada Highway Patrol. Longo was not wearing a helmet.

The NHP's investigation concluded the collision was a result of simple negligence, and there were no aggravating circumstances or egregious conduct involved.

Gibbons attorney David Houston issued a statement questioning District Attorney Mark Jackson's handling of the case.

"We are surprised and disappointed that the local district

attorney has decided to file charges," Houston said in the statement. "We thought the case should be handled by a prosecutor from outside of Douglas County. We believe that this case is more properly resolved in a civil court because our accident reconstruction has shown that Judge Gibbons did not hit the bicyclist. This is a tragic incident for all."

If convicted, Gibbons faces up to a $1,000 fine, a one-year suspension of his driver's license and six months in jail.

Gibbons, a former chief deputy district attorney, was first elected to the bench in 1994 and re-elected in 1996, 2002 and 2008.

He's scheduled to make an initial appearance in East Fork Township Justice Court on Jan. 13.

Online poker generating income for gaming firms

By Richard N. Velotta, Las Vegas Sun

Gaming companies blazing the trail for online poker are starting to generate revenue from their Internet investments.

It's still too early to determine exactly how much they have made and how sustained the results will be, but frontrunners Caesars Entertainment and Station Casinos both have realized proceeds from online gaming.

Caesars, parent company of Harrah's Lake Tahoe and Harveys, began generating online poker revenue during the third quarter of the year in Nevada and the fourth quarter in New Jersey. The company's third-quarter earnings included only 11 days of

online poker revenue. Caesars unveiled its World Series of Poker site Sept. 19. The company didn’t specify online poker revenue in its earnings report.

Station got an even earlier start, having already managed more than 1 million hands here, and is ready to roll out its product in New Jersey. Both companies take a percentage of gamblers’ money for every hand played.

Overall, Caesars reported revenue of $2 billion, down 0.7 percent from the third quarter last year. The company reported $112 million in casino revenue, a 7 percent decline offset by lower promotional expenses and increases in nongaming revenue.

Read the whole story