Cost of 12 days of Christmas increases

By Reuters

Buying a set of the gifts named in the classic holiday carol “The Twelve Days of Christmas” will cost a true love $27,393 this year, up 7.7 percent from the 2012 price tag, according to an annual tongue-in-cheek analysis released on Monday.

Prices for most of the items in the song, including the partridge, two turtle doves, three French hens and five gold rings, remained steady from last year.

But the cost for 10 lords-a-leaping jumped 10 percent to $5,243 and nine ladies dancing increased by 20 percent to $7,553, PNC Wealth Management’s Christmas Price Index showed.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Zephyr Cove Lodge Restaurant has been renovated, as has the menu. In November it was named Best Restaurant at the 47th annual Soroptimist Food and Wine Tasting.

• On-the-books occupancy for mountain travel in the Western United States from November through April is up 8.7 percent compared to the same time last year and revenues are up 14 percent, according to Denver-based DestiMetrics.

• Among the *San Francisco Chronicle*'s top 100 U.S. wines are: Skinner El Dorado Viognier 2011, Four Fields El Dorado Grenache 2011, Holly's Hill Petit Patriarche El Dorado Red 2010, Forlorn Hope San Hercumer delle Frecce Amador County Barbera 2011, and Turley Wine Cellars Judge Bell Amador County Zinfandel 2011.

• The feature length film "Branded" is being filmed at Strawberry Lodge. The cast includes: Jeremy London, Jason London, Susan Duerden and Burton Perez.

• South Tahoe High grad Jerod Haase is making a name for himself in the world of college basketball coaches. Check out the results of this game.

Supreme Court declines online sales tax case

By Robert Barnes, Washington Post

On one of the busiest online-shopping days of the year, the Supreme Court declined Monday to get involved in state efforts to force Web retailers such as Amazon.com to collect sales tax from customers even in places where the companies do not have a physical presence.

The multibillion-dollar issue — which could end tax-free online shopping for many Americans — is one of the most important in modern retailing. Traditional bricks-and-mortar businesses say the online retailers receive an unfair advantage by not having to collect sales taxes in some areas.

It is the second time the court has opted against hearing such

a challenge.

All but five states impose sales taxes on purchases, whether online or not, and an increasing number have passed legislation to force online retailers such as Overstock.com and eBay to begin collecting those taxes from customers.

The court’s decision to stay out of the issue for now may put more pressure on Congress to come up with a national solution, as both online and traditional retailers complain about a patchwork of state laws and conflicting lower-court decisions.

Read the whole story

CTC to begin controlled burns

The California Tahoe Conservancy will be burning slash piles now through spring.

Piles are scattered about on 90 acres in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

These operations are part of the Conservancy’s ongoing program to promote forest health by thinning overstocked, unhealthy trees and reducing forest fuels. The areas include Meyers, Van Sickle Bi-State Park and Sunnyside.

Expect to see smoke from the project areas. Smoke from prescribed burns may continue for several days after the initial ignition and is regularly monitored.

For weekly updates, call (530) 543.6061.

Live Violence Free looking for donations

For the 13th year, Live Violence Free is organizing an opportunity for community members and businesses to come together to provide happier holidays for local survivors of violence.

Last year the community helped hundreds of individuals who were working with Live Violence Free.

There are many ways to help, including:

• Choose one of the ornaments from the “Giving Tree” to either adopt a child or make a donation toward the Gift of Hope Program to support the center’s shelter.

• The agency’s programs have yearlong needs. A contribution of gift cards for clothing, diapers, and non-perishable food items will help ensure programs support survivors through their journey toward healing.

• Make a special end-of-the-year tax deductible donation toward Live Violence Free to support comprehensive and trusted programs and services for survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault and child abuse.

• Donate time as a volunteer working directly with survivors of violence, educating our community about violence, assisting with fundraising events, or by providing administrative support to our advocates.

The deadline to adopt a child is Dec. 6th and the deadline to turn in gifts is Dec. 11 by 4pm.

Live Violence Free is located at 2941 Lake Tahoe Blvd., South Lake Tahoe.

For more info, contact Christina at (530) 544.2118, ext. 7650 or czepeda@liveviolencefree.org.

LTVA makes it easy to donate to Christmas Cheer

Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority is setting up a “drive and drop” for Christmas Cheer.

People may drive through the parking lot at 3066 Highway 50, South Lake Tahoe, and drop donations into the bins provided by South Tahoe Refuse. Bins will be available Dec. 9-14 from 9am–5pm.

Christmas Cheer feeds families every month. The need for wholesome meals is even more important to those with children who are out of school at the holidays.

For information, call (530) 541.5255.

Politically-charged Briggs family at center of land deal to build courthouse in

Placerville

By Kathryn Reed

El Dorado County supervisors are proceeding with buying the land for a courthouse in Placerville even though it is mired in controversy.

On today's meeting agenda is a closed session item to discuss allowing the county to go forward with negotiating buying property owned by John Briggs. He is the father of Supervisor Ron Briggs, grandfather of Placerville Planning Commissioner Brian Briggs and father-in-law of Superior Court Judge Steve Bailey. John Briggs is also the former state senator who is famous for the 1978 proposition called the Briggs Initiative that had it passed, would have meant all employees in California's education system who are gay or lesbian and their supporters would have been fired.

While the courthouse project has been in the planning phase since 2008, earlier this fall an anonymous letter was sent to the Judicial Council of California outlining a tangled web of conflicts of interest that would financially benefit the Briggs family.

The county needs to buy some of the land owned by the Briggs Family Trust, which is controlled by John Briggs. Ron Briggs owns two nearby parcels.

Ron Briggs did not return a phone call.



This is the courthouse in Placerville that would be replaced.

Curt Child, chief operating officer of the Judicial Council, told *Lake Tahoe News* his office sent the county a series of questions and is in the process of reviewing the responses. A decision whether the parcel in question is deemed a controversial site is expected by the end of the month. Steven Jahr, administrative director of the courts, will make that determination.

If it's deemed controversial, then the entire Judicial Council will review the matter. If Jahr says there is no controversy, the process moves forward.

"Courthouses are important to communities. Often there is some difference of views of where it should be located," Child said. "The anonymous letter raised some other issues beyond location."

The letter says, "Ron Briggs and his son purchased several nearby parcels of land adjacent to and abutting the 26.5 acre courthouse site that are also benefiting from all of these government funded improvements, in essence, they are land speculating with a guaranteed outcome paid for by the taxpayers."

Briggs, during his tenure on the board since 2007, has recused himself anytime courthouse matters have been before the board. However, the anonymous group contends Briggs "has been quite

busy behind the scenes making things happen for this project. He often shows up at redevelopment meetings and other meetings pushing the project."

John and Ron Briggs signed legal documents for the Judicial Council stating in essence they have done nothing unethical.

El Dorado County Counsel Ed Knapp responded to Judicial Council, saying, "The county is aware of no conflicts that should impair the ability of the county, city of Placerville, and the state to move forward with the construction of this much needed courthouse. Nor is the county aware of any legitimate reason this should be considered a controversial site."

The anonymous group says twice it has asked the grand jury to investigate whether improprieties have occurred and each time the jury was prevented from doing so. The 2012-13 grand jury was disbanded midterm. Bailey was the presiding judge of the grand jury at the time.

The group said in its letter, "As concerned citizens and taxpayers for honest, open and transparent government, and in light of the current state budget problems, we request that the state Office of the Courts not fund this site acquisition or any further construction costs until the matter has been fully investigated to be assured there is not illegal activity, misuse of government funds, profiteering, favoritism or impropriety and that taxpayers, the state and federal government are not paying for the private real estate development interest of the Briggs family."

The new facility would replace the two Placerville buildings now being used by the court. One is the courthouse built in 1913 on Main Street. The court also uses a portion of a building in the county government center. Neither building has adequate security nor do they meet current regulations such as seismic and Americans with Disabilities Act rules.

The Main Street courthouse is the oldest of the five court facilities in the county.

If all goes forward, the building could be completed in the third quarter of 2018. The 87,642-square-foot facility would contain six courtrooms – the same number Placerville now has. The new building would be able to handle any type of case, have holding cells for defendants, and secure parking for judges as well as 240 spaces for on-site parking for support staff, visitors, and jurors.

The expected cost is $91 million.

The money comes from assessments on traffic and criminal convictions – not from the budget of the trial court. The cash is supposed to be put in a trust fund, but the Legislature more than once has tapped into the account for its own purposes.

Opinion: Revamp S. Tahoe's mayoral process

By Kathryn Reed

In one week, South Lake Tahoe will presumably have a new mayor.

It is customary that the council selects the mayor at the first December meeting. And it is customary that the mayor pro tem becomes the mayor. There have been exceptions, including mayors serving for more than one term.

This has pretty much been the process since the city incorporated in 1965. For most of those 48 years the role of

mayor has been little more than ceremonial. The primary job is to run meetings that are once or twice a month. The mayor signs paperwork. That person helps set the agenda with city staff. And the mayor attends events in town on behalf of the city.

The Brown Act doesn't allow for council members to work out among themselves ahead of time who the mayor will be. At most, they may discuss this, or any topic, with one other council member.

If I were to bet, on Dec. 10 I would say Hal Cole – who is mayor pro tem – would become mayor and Brooke Laine mayor pro tem. But that's not what I'm advocating for.

First, I think we need to change the process of how the mayor is chosen. And while that is not likely to happen this year, it is time the citizenry became more interested in who the mayor of South Lake Tahoe is.

In the last few years as the city has taken a stronger stance regionally, in California and Nevada, and nationally, the role of mayor has evolved into more than a ceremonial position. Mayors are seen as leaders of a city and a notch above the other council members. With the title, there is a perceived sense of power from the person who has the job and those looking in from beyond the basin.

That is why it is time South Lake Tahoe rethinks how the mayor is chosen. Right now it's a bit of popularity contest. If your colleagues don't like you, you won't get to be mayor. Just ask Bill Crawford and Bruce Grego. There have been others, too, in the past who served on the council without ever being mayor.

I am not a fan of the top vote getter being mayor. Being most popular does not make one most qualified.

It's probably not legal, but what if when there is a council election, if there could be a question asking who out of the

candidates as well as the council members not up for election would you want to be mayor? And then the top person became mayor.

Or what if the five council members had to fill out an application form like city commissioners do? A special form would be created for this position. Then each person wanting the position could give a short speech about why they are best. The five deliberate in public and a vote is taken.

Then the mayor gets to pick the mayor pro tem.

Or maybe there should be a public committee convened to pick the mayor? There have been community members asked to help select staff.

What if the mayor had the job for two years?

These are just things to think about. I'm sure others have better ideas. But we as the residents of South Lake Tahoe should start thinking about how our mayor gets appointed and who it is. That person represents us. We have the power to effect change in the process if we want to.

So, if I were the anointer of South Lake Tahoe's mayor and mayor pro tem, I would pick Angela Swanson and Brooke Laine, respectively.

First, Tom Davis' lack of leadership this past year as mayor proves he does not warrant a second term. As mayor he showed up at the state Legislature wearing one of his infamous Hawaiian type shirts. And he was there to give testimony. He used his tired phrase to tell the lawmakers "it was like speed dating" when it came to the amount of time he had to talk.

Davis and Hal Cole are often dismissive to their female colleagues.

At the Veterans Day ceremony Davis acknowledged the whereabouts of all of his colleagues except for Swanson. Davis

and Cole have shunned Swanson in part because she was party to a charity taking money from someone who was later sent to prison on felony drug charges. She has never been charged with a crime, let alone arrested. Cole also hasn't forgiven Swanson for alleging he was being racist during a council meeting.

While Cole runs a meeting well, he is not one who likes to socialize and glad-hand. Plus, he is the city's rep on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board. Doing both well can be difficult. (Think Claire Fortier.)

JoAnn Conner is still too green to be mayor.

Laine, while she has served on the council for four years before this stint and was mayor, is there this time as an appointee to Fortier's term. No one who was not elected by the citizens of South Lake Tahoe should be mayor, in my opinion. If she had been elected, I would have picked her. She is the only one who looks at people when they speak – whether it's the public, a colleague or staff. The others have dismissive body language to colleagues, spend time on smart phones despite a ban on them, and often don't seem to pay attention.

Put Laine in as mayor pro tem. This way if she runs for re-election in a year and gets on, she would be the front runner for the job as mayor – especially if the process is not changed.

While some could say by default this leaves Swanson as the choice for mayor, but the truth is she is the right person for the job. She has come out as saying she is not running for re-election next year because she wants to be county supervisor. Being mayor will give the public a chance to see if she is a leader. It will force her to learn the meaning of the word brevity and practice it – because a mayor needs to have that skill and she has yet to demonstrate she has it. The mayor should be the last person to give her or his opinion. She will need to be efficient with her time and be able to not mix

campaigning with city work. That will be a test of ethics.

Swanson has shown leadership by taking on tasks beyond the expected council assignments. She is working in Sacramento on behalf of the city. At some point she will have to demonstrate how all those hours translate into meaningful benefits for the city and not just for herself as she seeks a life in politics.

This is by no means an endorsement of Swanson for supervisor. It’s just one person saying Swanson should be mayor of South Lake Tahoe for the next year. And more important, it’s time we rethink how the mayor is chosen.

Nevada has money to buy private forest land

The Nevada Division of Forestry is accepting applications for grants up to $400,000 to purchase private forest land.

Local governments, qualified nonprofit organizations and Indian tribes are eligible to apply for grants to establish community forests through the acquisition of private forest land from a willing seller. NDF administers the pass through of these grants from the U.S. Forest Service, which has $5 million to distribute nationally for this program.

The purpose of the program is to establish community forests by protecting forest land from conversion to non-forest uses and provide community benefits such as sustainable forest management, clean air, water, and wildlife habitat, forest-based educational programs and recreational benefits to the public.

Eligible lands under this program are private forests that are at least 5 acres, suitable to sustain natural vegetation and at least 75 percent forested. The lands must also be threatened by conversion to non-forest uses, not be held in trust by the United States on behalf of any Indian tribe or allotment lands, provide community benefits defined by the Community Forest Program and allow public access.

Applications are due to the Nevada Division of Forestry by Jan. 15. For more info or an application, go online or call (775) 684.2500.

Nevada child care costs among highest in nation

By Paul Takahashi, Las Vegas Sun

Aaron Trujillo wasn't expecting sticker shock when he started searching for an affordable day care center for his 1-year-old daughter last month.

Trujillo, 30, and his wife both work for a Las Vegas apartment management company and make a combined $72,000 annually. When his wife returned to her job as a real estate agent in November, Trujillo began looking at putting their toddler, Bealla, into day care.

The Trujillo family looked at three preschools near their central valley home. The first charged $240 a week. That's $960 a month – the equivalent of a rent or mortgage check for many Southern Nevadans.

“It was ridiculous,” Trujillo said. “That’s really not affordable.”

After much searching – even checking Craigslist for cheaper child care – the Trujillos settled on a Kidz Kidz Kidz preschool near Tropicana Avenue and Jones Boulevard. The family was swayed by a special deal of $140 a week.

Still, with their older son Andres, 10, in a Safekey afterschool program and Bealla in preschool, Trujillo estimates he will spend about $800 a month for child care on his two children. “It’s still really pricey,” Trujillo said.

His observation is on the mark.

A national study found that Nevada has among the highest child care costs in the country. The Silver State is among 31 states nationally where child care costs could exceed the cost of college tuition and fees, according to a 2013 report from the advocacy group Child Care Aware of America.

Read the whole story