Lake Tahoe PR firm wins 4 awards

Weidinger Public Relations won four awards from the Public Relations Society of American, Sierra Nevada Chapter.

The Silver Spike designation is the highest honor from the chapter and identifies outstanding achievement, far-reaching client results, and high standards for quality of work and ethics.

The Stateline agency received awards for each of its four entries: two Silver Spikes and two Awards of Excellence.

Three awards were for projects for the Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority and one for Tahoe Transportation District, including the American Century Championship, Incline Gateway, Operation Sierra Storm, and Redevelopment Renaissance.

Retailers begin discounts early to entice shoppers

By Cotten Timberlake, Bloomberg

U.S. retailers are discounting earlier than ever as they brace for the weakest holiday shopping season since 2009.

Wal-Mart Stores Inc. is dangling a 32-inch flat-screen TV for $98, down from $148 last year. Sears Holdings Corp. has waived layaway fees and its Kmart chain is introducing a rent-to-own program. More than a dozen retailers are opening earlier, or for the first time, on Thanksgiving Day. Among the attention-grabbing stunts: a $1 million jackpot for one of the first shoppers to visit Gap Inc.'s Old Navy chain on Black Friday.

Faced with wary shoppers and a shorter holiday season, retailers are piling on deals as they jockey for market share during the most important sales period of the year. For the fourth year in a row, disposable incomes in 2013 have only inched up. As result, low-income Americans will again have a less-merry season than affluent consumers, who are more flush thanks in part to surging stock markets.

"We will be seeing promotions significantly above the current 30 percent off, which are the opening table stakes," said Craig Johnson, president of Customer Growth Partners, a New Canaan, Connecticut-based consulting firm. Stores have too much inventory, which "doesn't bode well for 2014."

The disparity between wealthy and lower-income shoppers is already showing up in chains' fourth-quarter profit estimates, with Tiffany & Co. projected to fare better than Wal-Mart and Kohl's Corp.

Read the whole story

Coke doesn't want people drinking tap water

By Andy Bellatti, Huffington Post

While public health advocates have sung the praises of tap water for years, Coca-Cola has been focusing on its own covert assault on the affordable, healthful, and refreshing beverage.

Unbeknownst to many in the nutrition and public health world, the soft drink giant launched a “Cap the Tap” program – aimed at restaurants – in 2010, described in the following manner on the Coke Solutions website:

> *Capture Lost Revenue By Turning Off the Tap*
>
> *Every time your business fills a cup or glass with tap water, it pours potential profits down the drain. The good news: Cap the Tap – a program available through your Coca-Cola representative – changes these dynamics by teaching crew members or wait staff suggestive selling techniques to convert requests for tap water into orders for revenue-generating beverages.*

Coca-Cola cites a 2006 tap water usage study to point out the obvious – that consumers drink tap water because of habit, health concerns or price sensitivity.

In response to that, Coca-Cola suggests restaurant waitstaff “turn off the tap” and offers to teach servers how to suggest “profitable beverages” to consumers, citing free refills. For those who truly want tap water, Coca-Cola suggests that servers push bottled water (don’t forget that Coke owns the bottled water brand Dasani), diet sodas, iced teas, and smoothies.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Live Violence Free is no longer providing food distribution at its South Lake Tahoe office. The agency is facilitating distribution of food, clothing, and other basic need items at the American Legion, at 2748 Lake Tahoe Blvd. Food distribution will take place every Wednesday from 10am-12:30pm.

• Rabbi Mordey Richler and his wife, Shaina, have opened Chabad of Lake Tahoe at 1898 Venice Drive in South Lake Tahoe. They offer Shabbat and holiday services, Torah study classes, women's circle, kids' club and teen program. They also offer a kosher takeout menu, preparing foods for Shabbat dinner and other holiday meals in their kitchen. For more info, go online or call (530) 314.7677.

• Peter Strand is now president of Sierra Sotheby's International Realty.

• Gov. Jerry Brown appointed Michael Stainer, 50, of El Dorado Hills as director of the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation Division of Adult Institutions.

• El Dorado County will not be offering the free bus service through Apple Hill next year because it didn't improve traffic. The bus was caught in all the traffic, too, and that didn't make people happy.

K’s Kitchen: Not an ordinary taco salad

By Kathryn Reed

So many recipes that sound good to me come with meat. Such is the case with the one below. But it’s also one of the easier ones to eliminate the meat.

Recipes like this are ideal for when there are meat and non-meat eaters at the table. Just put the chicken on the salads of those who want it.

Barbecuing the chicken is a good idea for this dish.

My sister, Tami, originally shared the recipe with me. She got it from “Cooking Light” magazine.

I recommend using a whole avocado and more cilantro. And the chipotle has quite a kick, so judge accordingly based on how much spice your tablemates like.

Putting tortilla chips in a basket allows for the salad to be scooped up that way, too.

This makes enough for four, with leftovers. And that’s without the chicken.

Chipotle Chicken Taco Salad

Dressing:

1/3 C chopped fresh cilantro

2/3 C light sour cream

1 T minced chipotle chile, canned in adobo sauce

1 tsp ground cumin

1 tsp chili powder

4 tsp fresh lime juice

¼ tsp salt

Salad:

4 C shredded romaine lettuce

2 C chopped roasted skinless, boneless chicken breasts (about 2 breasts)

1 C cherry tomatoes, halved

½ C diced peeled avocado

1/3 C thinly vertically sliced red onion

1 15 ounce can black beans, rinsed and rained

1 8¼ ounce can no salt added whole kernel corn, rinsed and drained

Dressing: combine first 7 ingredients, stirring well.

Salad: combine lettuce and remaining ingredients in a large bowl. Pour dressing over salad to gently coat. Serve immediately.

TRPA OKs S. Tahoe’s blueprint to revitalization

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – A sense of hope filled the packed room Wednesday as the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Governing Board unanimously approved South Lake Tahoe’s Tourist Core Area Plan.

Of the 16 people who spoke Nov. 20, only Jennifer Quashnick representing the Tahoe Area Sierra Club and Friends of the West Shore was against the plan. She represents the two groups suing the TRPA over the Regional Plan that was adopted nearly a year ago.

Nearly every person who spoke after her later mocked Quashnick, who said she had the support of the more than 2.4 million Sierra Club members. The speakers then said how many people they represent.

South Tahoe officials want more of the town to be visually appealing like Heavenly Village. Photo/LTN file

Even Governing Board Member Bill Yeats, who is an ardent supporter of the Sierra Club and has been the group's attorney, said he was pretty sure not every member was in lockstep with her.

He went on to say, "I find it difficult to agree with (the Sierra Club), but find no problem with this plan."

Coverage and height issues have been some of the concerns with the plan. These are some of same concerns people raised as the Regional Plan was being updated. Today's thinking is that if there are town centers, then people will park once and walk to places. The goal is also have mixed uses in these areas.

"No new coverage can be created," Hal Cole, South Lake Tahoe's rep to the board, said. "Since 1987 we have been trying to repair the damage done since the 1960s."

1987 was when the first Regional Plan was adopted. While it limited growth, it also was a stumbling block to redevelopment. The 1960s brought shoddy construction, an abundance of hotel rooms for the Winter Olympics that were at Squaw and unprecedented development without any concern for the environment.

South Tahoe's plan complements the area plan approved earlier this fall for Douglas County's commercial area at the South Shore.

While the area plans do not have specific projects associated with them, they do provide incentives for private landowners. Part of this has to do with swapping land coverage from sensitive areas to the town centers, streamlining the permitting process, and access to commodities like commercial floor area and tourist accommodation units.

The South Lake Tahoe plan covers the same area as the community plan adopted in 1994 that went from Stateline to Ski Run Boulevard. The area plan is a new tool that TRPA wants jurisdictions to use in conjunction with the Regional Plan.

Hilary Roverud, who runs the city's planning department, told the board since the 1994 document was approved more than 1 million square feet of coverage have been removed from that area, vehicle miles have been reduced, and stormwater runoff has been captured so not as much sediment is reaching Lake Tahoe.

"Without redevelopment, today we are looking toward the Tourist Core Area Plan to help create public-private partnerships," Roverud said.

The city on this same day took a major step in stimulating cash flow from that area. The $7 million parking garage bonds were refinanced Nov. 20 at an average interest rate of 4.94 percent. The 30-year bonds have a 5.1 percent interest rate. The old rate was more than 7 percent. This means a more than $250,000 annual savings to South Lake Tahoe.

The area plan will come back to the City Council because TRPA made some changes. One item deals with strengthening coverage reduction and stream environmental zone restoration strategies, and another centers on improving total maximum daily load coordination. Here are the area plan modifications.

The City Council has one meeting in December – on Dec. 10.

Opinion: Obamacare is really disaster-care

By Ted Gaines

The so-called Affordable Care Act (ACA), better known as Obamacare, was a disaster to start with and gets worse every day. It’s such a confusing mess, with ever-changing targets, that even the Obama administration seems to be winging it on the biggest social policy shift since the New Deal.

Last week the president committed a stunning about-face by announcing that insurance companies could temporarily continue offering insurance plans that were going to be canceled because they don’t meet the “essential benefits” requirements of the Obamacare plans. As many as 10 million people were scheduled to lose their plans as of Jan. 1. Now they aren’t – or at least might not be – because it’s not clear the president had the authority to change the law without Congress.

Now the insurance companies don’t know if they will be breaking the law if they follow the president’s lead. People have no idea what policies they will be able to buy. Nobody seems to know anything, and everyone is scrambling to get information to help them make these important decisions. And who knows what the rules will be next week?

Ted Gaines

One thing that is clear, though, is that some people are going to be kicked out of their old plans and have to buy new, ACA-sanctioned plans, and they’re not going to like it. The ACA plans all have loads of useless add ons that most will never use but will still have to pay for. Men’s plans will have mandatory maternity coverage. People who have never had so much as a sip of alcohol will have to pay for heroin treatment in their plans. It’s ridiculous and it’s expensive.

People in my Senate district have been shocked by costs of the new plans. Here are a few examples from my constituents:

“I now pay $430 a month. For the same coverage/plan starting Jan. 1 it will go up to $800 a month. My husband and I own a small business and don’t know how we are going to afford keeping healthcare insurance at that price…”

“My existing premium is $240/month. The least expensive new quoted premium is $404/month. Not only is this a 67 percent increase in premiums, but also an increase in the co-insurance from 0 percent to 40 percent.”

“I was informed that my health insurance plan has been canceled. I liked my plan. I guess I don’t get to keep it. The plan that was offered to me and my husband was three times what I was paying before! We cannot afford to pay more.”

Somebody needs to tell me and all of these people how this is considered “affordable” to anyone? If we really wanted affordability, we would loosen the reins on insurance companies, and let them offer plans across state lines to increase competition. We would let them sell customized plans that weren’t full of coverage that people will never use. If we took just those two steps, California consumers would have so many more options at so many more prices. We would have a better marketplace and everyone would benefit. Instead, we are going for the central planning route that has never been successful for getting people what they want for a good value.

After years of work and billions of dollars invested, nobody knows for sure when Obamacare starts or how much it costs and this confusion has been a huge factor in the pitifully low enrollment rates. For average people just wanting to know what they have to do not to break the new law or break their bank, it’s too confusing and changes too often to let them make good decisions.

When it came to healthcare reform, the Obama administration didn’t know what to do or how to do it. They’ve just made everything worse. Free-market reforms could have given citizens better options at a fraction of the cost, without having the government hijack one-sixth percent of the economy.

Ted Gaines represents the 1st Senate District, which includes all or parts of Alpine, El Dorado, Lassen, Modoc, Nevada, Placer, Plumas, Sacramento, Shasta, Sierra and Siskiyou counties.

Alice Waters wants to change aging in America

By Laura Hambleton, Washington Post

Alice Waters has helped change the way Americans eat. Chez Panisse, her restaurant in Berkeley, began serving organic, locally harvested food when it opened in 1971 and Waters, now 69, was a mere 27 years old. Today, Chez Panisse is consistently named one of the top 50 restaurants in the world.

Waters has tried to get Americans to rethink what they eat, promoting everything from the slow-food (as opposed to fast-food) movement to more-nutritious school lunches. Her ninth cookbook, “The Art of Simple Food II,” has just been released.

Waters said she isn’t slowing down, though she is contemplating new endeavors: “I want to find the people who have the same set of values [as I do] and really want to make change happen in public education.”

She recently spoke to the *Post* about aging, and how it feels to grow older.

I feel like old age in America is a very sad thing. I have been many different places around the world where getting older is something you look forward to. You have an opportunity to be someone who is respected, someone who is contributing to life in a very important way. That’s not happening in this country.

Read the whole story

Colleges addressing needs of work force

By Ellie Ashford, Community College Times

Competency-based education (CBE) can be valuable in ensuring community colleges provide the right kind of training to get people into the job market quickly with the skills employers need.

That’s the consensus of higher education leaders at a forum on community colleges and CBE on Monday hosted by the New America Foundation and co-sponsored by the foundation, the American Association of Community Colleges, Western Governors University and the American Council on Education.

The essence of CBE is “flipping time and mastery,” said Sally Johnstone, vice president of academic advancement at WGU. Under the traditional education model, everyone starts a course at the same time and finishes at the same time. Some students master the material, and some don’t.

With CBE, everyone masters the material, although some take longer to do so, said Johnstone, who describes CBE as “a platform that enables individualized learning."

Read the whole story

Lukins water good to drink without boiling

The "boil water" mandate for Lukins Brothers Water customers has been lifted.

"We are pleased to report that the problem has been corrected and that it is no longer necessary to drink boiled or bottled water. We apologize for any inconvenience and thank you for your patience," the company said in a notice dated Nov. 20.

Lukins will continue to chlorinate the water system as a preventative measure.

Because one of the test sites had come back positive for coliform, the 963 South Shore water customers had to boil water since Nov. 14.

All samples since then have tested negative for total coliform and E. coli.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report