Thanksgiving meal costs a little less this year

By Katie Little, CNBC

Finally, some good news for consumers to chew on: That Thanksgiving feast will be a little less expensive.

The average cost of this year's holiday dinner for 10 eased down 0.9 percent to $49.04 from $49.48 last year, according to a survey from the American Farm Bureau Federation released on Thursday.

The survey's shopping list includes typical Turkey Day fare, including turkey, stuffing, sweet potatoes, rolls with butter, cranberry sauce and pumpkin pie with whipped cream.

About half of the items became more expensive while the other half fell in price. The biggest decrease this year came from a drop in turkey prices. Prices of rolls and green peas also fell. Meanwhile, sweet potatoes, pumpkin-pie mix and milk made up the biggest increases in this year's basket.

"Most Americans will pay about the same as last year at the grocery store for a turkey and all the trimmings," said John Anderson, AFBF's deputy chief economist in a news release. "Slightly higher turkey production for much of the year coupled with an increase in birds in cold storage may be responsible for the moderate price decrease our shoppers reported."

Read the whole story

Time to give blood

BloodSource will have a blood drive Dec. 2 from noon-6pm in South Lake Tahoe.

Participants will receive a parking validation for the Lake Tahoe Resort Hotel parking lot.

The blood drive is sponsored by the Barton Memorial Hospital Auxiliary.

For more information, call Dan Kerr at (775) 781.5343.

Learn how Tahoe’s animals survive winter

Have you ever wondered what Tahoe’s animals do for the winter? Will Richardson of the Tahoe Institute for Natural Science will present an overview of the strategies used by Tahoe wildlife for enduring long Sierra Nevada winters, and highlight many fascinating examples of how they are employed.

The talk is Dec. 5 at 5:30pm at the Tahoe Center for Environmental Sciences, 291 Country Club Drive, Incline Village.

Cost is $5.

Companies target workers who are fat, smoke

By Kathleen Kingsbury, Reuters

Employers tried the carrot, then a small stick. Now they are turning to bigger cudgels.

For years they encouraged workers to improve their health and productivity with free screenings, discounted gym memberships and gift cards to lose weight. More recently, a small number charged smokers slightly higher premiums to get them to quit.

Results for these plans were lackluster, and healthcare costs continued to soar. So companies are taking advantage of new rules under President Barack Obama's healthcare overhaul in 2014 to punish smokers and overweight workers.

Some will even force employees to meet weight goals, quit smoking and provide very personal information or pay up to thousands more annually for healthcare. That could disproportionately affect the poor, who are more likely to smoke and can't afford the higher fees.

Nearly 40 percent of large U.S. companies will use surcharges in 2014, such as higher insurance premiums or deductibles for individuals who do not complete company-set health goals, according to a survey of 892 employers released in September by human resources consultancy Towers Watson and National Business Group on Health, which represents large employers.

That is almost twice as many as the last time they did the survey in 2011, when only 19 percent of companies had such penalties. The number is expected to climb to two-thirds of employers by 2015.

Read the whole story

PCSD promotes several officers

Placer County Sheriff's Department has had a series of promotions.

Mark Reed is now a captain. Reed was most recently assigned to lead the Investigations Division. He will be taking over as the commander of the Support Services Division.

Jeff Swearingen was promoted to the rank of lieutenant. Swearingen was most recently assigned to lead the Crimes Against Persons Unit in the Investigations Division. He will be reassigned to the Corrections Division.

Ben Machado was promoted to sergeant. Machado was most recently assigned to the Special Investigations Unit as an investigator.

Stacy Renegar was promoted to sergeant. Renegar was most recently assigned to the Crimes Against Persons Unit as an investigator.

Lt. John Poretti took over command of the Investigations Division from Reed. He is also public information officer.

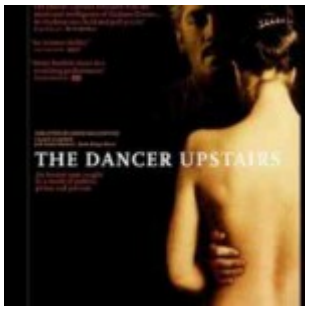
'The Dancer Upstairs' delves

into Peru’s past

By Kathryn Reed

Anyone who has read anything about Peru knows it is a country that has a history of corruption and violence.

Author Nicholas Shakespeare tapped into that history in “The Dancer Upstairs”, a novel that was published in 1995. While it is fiction, Shakespeare finds inspiration from the notorious Shining Path guerrilla group.



Having lived in South America and being a journalist adds to Shakespeare’s ability to capture what it was like during this turbulent, violent time in Peru.

Shakespeare based the novel on what really happened with Abimael Guzmán, the leader of Shining Path – right down to the dance studio.

“The Dancer Upstairs” was turned into a movie in 2001, which I have not seen.

The book is full of suspense, drama and tangled relationships.

I’m not sure if it was my spells of not picking up the book or the author not writing clearly, but at times I was confused about what was going on. I’m guessing the reader and not the writer was the problem.

The book goes back and forth between real time and the cop telling a journalist about how the notorious crime leader was caught.

I pushed forward with reading because the plot was intriguing. And even though the story isn’t true, I’m sure having been to

Peru had something to do with the book captivating me on a deeper level.

Round Hill Pines Beach under new management

By Kathryn Reed

Round Hill Pines Beach will have new operators for the first time since 1968.

While Frank and Susan Forvilly wanted to keep operating the Nevada beach, the U.S. Forest Service said no. Instead, it was revealed Nov. 15 that Bob and Tammy Hassett will take over the operations starting with the 2014 season.

Four bids from potential concessionaires were submitted to the Forest Service. Per federal law the Forest Service does not have to disclose who the bidders were.



Round Hill Pines beach will have a new concessionaire for the first time in 46 years. Photo/LTN file

Douglas County had long been after the Forest Service to make changes to the popular beach area. Bid documents were finally released last December. Deadline extensions and the government shutdown delayed the process.

Steve Mokrohisky, Douglas County manager, was not available for comment.

Bob Hassett, per his MO, did not return phone calls. Hassett also operates the marinas at Camp Richardson, Timber Cove and Lakeside, as well as owns the Beacon Restaurant. (Earlier this year he sold the Fresh Ketch restaurant.)

Since 1984 the Forest Service has owned this half-mile of beach that includes a food area, pool and marina.

“Improvements could occur within 12-18 months, dependent on the completion of the (National Environmental Policy Act) process. The NEPA process will include public involvement. We want the community to have a voice in the redevelopment of the property, with the goal of ensuring that Round Hill Pines remains a family-oriented resort,” Cheva Heck, USFS spokeswoman, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

In the past this area had overnight accommodations. The Hassetts want to bring that back. New cabins will likely be built where the boarded up cabins sit at the top of the road before people descend to the beach. Yurt-like structures, which are all the rage, may also be built. Expect tent camping, too.

The current facilities are run down. The Hassetts want to change all of that. Rehabbing the historic lodge and adding food service are possible. Restrooms and showers are coming. The Forest Service said the Hassetts want to build a new day lodge to replace the restaurants that exist now. This would include room for special events and a camp store. The pool will also get a face-lift.

They also want to improve the entrance off the highway. Coming from the west the left turn to the beach area is a bit precarious because of how fast traffic is going in both directions.

Improved parking for vehicles and bikes are in the plans. More cyclists are expected to access the beach now that a trail goes to it from Stateline.

The beach is idyllic, with Mount Tallac a distinct fixture across the lake. This is a popular place for weddings because of the natural environment. A special event pavilion has been proposed.

The Hassetts have a 30-year lease to operate the facility. Financial details have not been released. But what the Hassetts pay the Forest Service will fluctuate based on the investment they make into the property.

It is not yet known if the entrance fee will increase. The Hassetts will propose a rate to the Forest Service, and the feds have ultimate say over that fee.

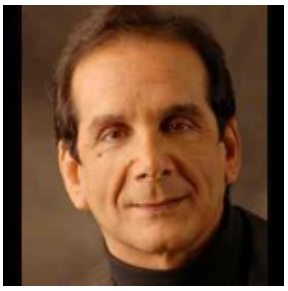
Opinion: Obama full of rhetoric

By Charles Krauthammer, Washington Post

The Obamacare website doesn’t work. Hundreds of thousands of insured Americans are seeing their plans summarily terminated. Millions more face the same prospect next year. Confronted with a crisis of governance, how does President Obama respond?

He campaigns.

“I’ve got one more campaign in me,” he told grass-roots supporters – a series of speeches and rallies, explains the *New York Times*, “to make sure his signature health care law works.”



Charles Krauthammer

Campaigning to make something work? How does that work? Presidential sweet-talk persuades the nonfunctional Web portal to function?

This odd belief that rhetoric trumps reality leads to strange scenes. Like the ShamWow pitch, Obama’s nationally televised address trying to resell Obamacare. Don’t worry about the website, he said. I’ll get it fixed. And besides, there are alternatives, such as an 800 number he promptly gave out. Twice.

You half expected him to offer a ShamWow special: Add the mop and get a free year of Obamacare! But the 800 number was more than bad form. It was bad substance. Turns out you can give all the information you want to the person at the other end of the line – or to your friendly community “navigator” – but that person must enter your data into the very same nonfunctioning website.

Read the whole story

Light up a Life remembers those who died

Barton Hospice will host the annual Light up a Life interfaith ceremony to honor those who have died.

The Dec. 4 6-7pm event at MontBleu in Stateline is free.

All attendees will receive a free personalized ornament.

To honor someone at the event, call (530) 543.5592.

Proper ash disposal can prevent unwanted fire

By Teri Mizuhara

All around town we see smoke rising from chimneys, signaling the arrival of fall with crisp days and cold evenings.

If you have a wood burning stove or fireplace, you know the drill well as you find yourself scraping out the old ashes that have accumulated as you burn firewood to heat your home.

If you properly dispose of the ashes from your fireplace or wood burning stove and place them in a metal can, you won't risk burning your property or that of your neighbors.

"Can your ashes" means when you clean your fireplace or wood burning stove make sure you place the hot ashes into a metal

can or container so you can safely transport them outside.

Proper ash disposal tips:

- When cleaning your fireplace or wood stove, always place your ashes in a metal container, never use a paper or plastic bag or cardboard box.
- Put the metal container outside and immediately pour water into the can to cool any hot embers. Coals or pieces of wood can smolder for days.
- Stir the water into the ashes with a stick, making sure everything is cold.
- Cover the container with a lid and store the metal container away from flammable materials.
- If you vacuum your ashes it is critical that you make sure you use an appropriate “ash vacuum” which is specially designed to hold hot and cold embers. Never, ever use your regular home vacuum.
- Never place ashes from your wood burning stove in your garbage can as they will catch your garbage can on fire.

Teri Mizuhara works for the Amador-El Dorado unit of CalFire.