Southwest Gas buys its headquarters

By Eli Segall, Las Vegas Sun

After spending millions a year on rent, Southwest Gas Corp. has cut a hefty check to become its own landlord.

The Las Vegas-based natural-gas provider bought the bulk of its Chinatown corporate headquarters this month for $16.5 million cash.

The property consists of three main office buildings. Southwest Gas has owned one since it opened in 1988 but had been leasing the others since they opened in 1982.

The purchase should save Southwest Gas money in the long run, as the company had been spending about $2 million a year in rent for the buildings since 2008, said Ken Kenny, vice president of finance and treasury.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• *ESPN* magazines' Body issue is out. Meyers snowboarder Jamie Anderson is in it.

• San Francisco 49ers Gold Rush cheerleaders shot their

2014-15 calendar photos in Lake Tahoe. Calendar will be available in the fall.

• Donner Lake Triathlon is July 26-27. For more info, go online.

• The U.S. Forest Service has obtained funding to repair the Swinging Bridge that was damaged in a wildland fire last summer. It is along the Western States Endurance Run trial. There will be volunteer opportunities in August to help. For more info, go online.

• The El Dorado County Charter Review Committee meets July 14 at 5pm in Placerville. Click here for the agenda.

Calif. parks short on water, including D.L. Bliss

By Tom Verdin, AP

SACRAMENTO – California's drought is beginning to dry up the water supplies for some state parks, including some of the system's most popular places.

Restrooms with flush toilets have been closed at D.L. Bliss State Park, the Hearst Castle Visitor Center and Hearst San Simeon State Park, replaced with portable toilets. The showers at D.L. Bliss, San Simeon and Portola Redwoods State Park also are shut down.

Each park relies on a local water supply, and in some cases, that's a creek or spring. D.L. Bliss, which gets more than

12,000 campers a year, relies on a spring that dropped noticeably just before Fourth of July weekend.

What water remains at the affected parks is being reserved for potable water at individual campsites and for firefighting, California Department of Parks and Recreation spokeswoman Vicky Waters told the Associated Press on Friday.

Some of the closures, such as at D.L. Bliss, are coming at the height of camping season. She said the Lake Tahoe campers who have reservations are being notified through automated phone calls and will be allowed to cancel without penalty.

“We’re really trying to minimize the impact to our visitors because we know how important it is … but we’re in this situation across the state,” Waters said.

The Hearst Castle Visitor Center receives 660,000 visitors a year, while the nearby San Simeon campground receives 83,000.

Waters said many parks, especially those in remote areas, have limited control over their water supplies. She said the department has taken steps to reduce consumption at all its parks and is monitoring the water supplies throughout the system.

At D.L. Bliss, popular for its sandy beach, crystal clear water and proximity to Emerald Bay, it is the first time the park has ever had to close bathrooms or showers because of a lack of water, District Superintendent Marilyn Linkem said.

She was notified July 2, just ahead of the holiday weekend, that the amount of water coming in from the spring that supplies the park was not keeping up with the demand. That prompted the closure of the showers and flush toilets in a park that typically swarms with families throughout summer.

Some visitors were upset, she said, but others understood because they’re already aware of the severity of the state’s

drought.

If the spring runs completely dry, she said the park is considering trucking in water to maintain potable sources at the campsites through Labor Day weekend. Meanwhile, the portable toilets are costing $1,200 a week, according to the state parks department.

Linkem said the park staff realizes the inconvenience to campers who made reservations months ago expecting flush toilets and showers.

“It’s hard for us, too. We’re used to providing quality customer services,” she said. “We’re doing the best we can.”

ACT test now mandatory in Nevada

By Brian Nordli, Las Vegas Sun

High school juniors will have a new required exam waiting for them in April that could help them prepare for college.

The Nevada State Board of Education unanimously approved a plan this week to administer the ACT exam to all high school juniors. The decision will allow the Department of Education to begin negotiating a contract with ACT to distribute its test.

While the exam is mandatory for all students, it will not affect whether a student will graduate. Instead, it gives high school juniors a free exam that is required to apply to many colleges.

The decision to adopt the ACT with writing comes after a law was passed during the 2013 Legislature that mandated all Nevada high schools to administer a “college and readiness” exam to juniors. An Education Department committee had ranked the ACT above the SAT and the McGraw Hill exam.

Read the whole story

Placer County deputy accused of having sex with minor

By Kim Minugh and Bill Lindelof, Sacramento Bee

A decorated Placer County sheriff’s deputy has been arrested on suspicion of having sex with a teen who was volunteering at his department, according to authorities.

Deputy Ken Skogen, a seven-year veteran most recently assigned to patrol, was arrested Thursday on suspicion of four felony counts, including unlawful sex with a minor and oral copulation with a minor, according to the District Attorney’s Office.

Skogen, 35, is suspected of having a sexual relationship in 2011 with a 17-year-old girl who was a volunteer at the time with the Placer County Sheriff’s Office.

Read the whole story

Puppet show for all ages in Genoa

Reading blasts-off this summer at Mormon Station State Historic Park with the Douglas County Public Library's special puppet show July 23.

Guest puppeteer Beth Hyland will share the story of King Gregory's quest to help his son. After the show, children will build a rocket to take home. All ages are welcome.

Meet at 10:30am under the trees in the park.

Mormon Station is located on the corner of Main Street and Genoa Lane in downtown Genoa.

Al Tahoe residents jittery over marsh plans

By Kathryn Reed

Proposed work by South Tahoe Public Utility District in the Upper Truckee Marsh has raised the awareness of Al Tahoe residents to the larger project the California Tahoe Conservancy is likely to undertake.

While the two are not related, they do involve the same area.



Trout Creek now runs close to STPUD infrastructure. Photos/Kathryn Reed

South Tahoe PUD's project is on the Conservancy board's July 17 agenda.

The heavy winter of 2011 saw Trout Creek flood its banks and the channel has been changed ever since. The problem with this is that is brings the stream close to the district's facilities at the end of Bellevue Avenue. A manhole cover is now just feet from the water.

"The district is planning to do a smaller type project to nudge water to the other side of the channel," Scott Carroll with CTC told *Lake Tahoe News*. "They want to redirect the water to the left so their site dries out."

The work to be done is on CTC property.

Members of the Al Tahoe neighborhood are planning to be at the CTC meeting to talk about this project and the final environment documents that are in the works.

While the comment period closed a year ago regarding restoring the 600-acres in the middle of South Lake Tahoe, there is a group of residents who now wants to have a say on what the preferred alternative is when the final environmental impact report/environmental impact statement is released.

Residents have had two meetings, with the latest being July 9. They are crafting a letter to present to the CTC board.

“We feel that the plan for the recreation component of the environmental impact report is beyond what really needs to be done in the marsh. It is going to have a negative impact on the welfare and nesting habitats of wildlife,” Greg Poseley, an Al Tahoe resident, told *Lake Tahoe News.*

Today, this eastern side of the marsh has user-created trails that go to Barton Beach. May through July the Conservancy bans dogs from the area. This property is also where the Tahoe Yellow Cress grows. It doesn’t exist anyplace outside the Lake Tahoe Basin.



Upper Truckee Marsh is one of the most sensitive areas in the Lake Tahoe Basin.

Several of the proposals in the draft EIR/EIS call for boardwalks into the marsh. Some would be viewing areas, others would be bike trails. And some of those bike trails would link to Cove East on the west side of the marsh that is accessed via Tahoe Keys.

The only way to make that link feasible for all cyclists would be to pave the Cove East trail. It is currently an earthen trail that is not conducive to road bikes.

“[The proposals] seem opposed to the principal vision of the

Conservancy, which is restoration, conservancy and preservation of habitat. Somewhere along the line the pressure of a recreation component has been introduced to the Conservancy," Poseley said. "They are more on board for helping with public access into this habitat as opposed to the preservation and conservation side of it. We feel they have lost sight of their original mission."

Another concern is that this would bring more people to the neighborhood which does not have public parking, other than in front of residences. At Wednesday's meeting neighbors voiced concern that the CTC lots in the area could be paved to solve that problem. They also brought up the Al Tahoe Plan Area Statement that says, "Access to and parking for the Barton Beach area should not be improved."

The Conservancy is working on a preferred alternative for the entire marsh restoration, which could be a combination of the initial four as well as include components from comments submitted last year.

It's possible the board will take action at the Sept. 18 meeting.

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Notes:

• California Tahoe Conservancy meets July 17, 9:30am in the board room at Lake Tahoe Community College.

• Info about the draft Upper Truckee River restoration project in online.

Opinion: Shrinking middle class worth worrying about

By Robert Reich

A few weeks ago I was visited in my office by the chairman of one of the country's biggest high-tech firms who wanted to talk about the causes and consequences of widening inequality and the shrinking middle class, and what to do about it.

I asked him why he was concerned. "Because the American middle class is the core of our customer base," he said. "If they can't afford our products in the years ahead, we're in deep trouble."



Robert Reich

I'm hearing the same refrain from a growing number of business leaders.

They see an economic recovery that's bypassing most Americans. Median hourly and weekly pay dropped over the past year, adjusted for inflation.

Since the depths of the Great Recession in 2009, median real household income has fallen 4.4 percent, according to an analysis by Sentier Research.

These business leaders know the U.S. economy can't get out of first gear as long as wages are declining. And their own businesses can't succeed over the long term without a buoyant

and growing middle class.

They also recognize a second danger.

Job frustrations are fueling a backlash against trade and immigration. Any hope for immigration reform is now dead in Congress, and further trade-opening agreements are similarly moribund. Yet the economy would be even worse if America secedes into isolationism.

Lloyd Blankfein, CEO of Goldman Sachs, warned recently on “CBS This Morning” that income inequality is “destablilizing” the nation and is “responsible for the divisions in the country.” He went on to say that “too much of the GDP over the last generation has gone to too few of the people.”

Blankfein should know. He pulled in $23 million last year in salary and bonus, a 9.5 percent raise over the year before and his best payday since the Wall Street meltdown. This doesn’t make his point any less valid.

Several of business leaders are suggesting raising the minimum wage and increasing taxes on the wealthy.

Bill Gross, chairman of Pimco, the largest bond-trading firm in the world, said this week that America needs policies that bring labor and capital back into balance, including a higher minimum wage and higher taxes on the rich.

Gross has noted that developed economies function best when income inequality is minimal.

Several months ago Gross urged his wealthy investors, who benefit the most from a capital-gains tax rate substantially lower than the tax on ordinary income, to support higher taxes on capital gains. “The era of taxing ‘capital’ at lower rates than ‘labor’ should now end,” he stated.

Similar proposals have come from billionaires Warren Buffett and Stanley Druckenmiller, founder of Duquesne Capital

Management and one of the top performing hedge fund managers of the past three decades. Buffett has suggested the wealthy pay a minimum tax of 30 percent of their incomes.

The response from the denizens of the right has been predictable: If these gentlemen want to pay more taxes, there's nothing stopping them.

Which misses the point. These business leaders are arguing for changes in the rules of the game that would make the game fairer for everyone. They acknowledge it's now dangerously rigged in the favor of people like them.

They know the only way to save capitalism is to make it work for the majority rather than a smaller and smaller minority at the top.

In this respect they resemble the handful of business leaders in the Gilded Age who spearheaded the progressive reforms enacted in the first decade of the twentieth century, or those who joined with Franklin D. Roosevelt to create Social Security, a minimum wage, and the 40-hour workweek during the Depression.

Unfortunately, the voices of these forward-thinking business leaders are being drowned out by backward-lobbying groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce that are organized to reflect the views of their lowest common denominator.

And by billionaires like Charles and David Koch, who harbor such deep-seated hatred for government they're blind to the real dangers capitalism now faces.

Those dangers are a sinking middle class lacking the purchasing power to keep the economy going, and an American public losing faith that the current system will deliver for them and their kids.

America's real business leaders understand unless or until the

middle class regains its footing and its faith, capitalism remains vulnerable.

Robert Reich, chancellor's professor of Public Policy at UC Berkeley and senior fellow at the Blum Center for Developing Economies, was cecretary of Labor in the Clinton administration.

Weight loss may depend if you are having fun exercising

By Melissa Healy, Los Angeles Times

A study delves into one of the great mysteries of diet, exercise and weight loss: why, when you've started a grueling exercise regimen in a bid to shape up, it's common to gain, not lose weight.

Sure, there's the old reassurance that muscles weigh more than fat. But when the weight gain comes before any evidence that we've changed our body composition significantly, I think we all know we're kidding ourselves.

"Framing" – or the way we think about – the experience of exercise matters, a trio of researchers at Cornell University's food psychology lab found. More specifically, they found, it influences not only what we choose to eat after the experience, but how much of it.

When we think of the physical activity we engage in as fun, or at least incidental to fun, we make better food choices. When we frame physical activity as exercise, we're more likely to choose rewarding foods and to eat more of them, the study

found.

Read the whole story

Needle miner infestation spreading in Tahoe



Trees in the Al Tahoe area of South Lake Tahoe are orange from the needle miner. Photo/LTN file

The insect blamed for attacking trees in the Al Tahoe neighborhood of South Lake Tahoe is now making itself known along Pioneer Trail near the intersection with Highway 50 in Meyers.

While some Jeffrey pine trees appear to be dying, the yellowing of the needles is due to the work of a native insect species known as a needle miner. It feeds on the needles of pine trees.

While this particular needle miner feeds only on Jeffrey

pines, it is closely related to others that live in lodgepole and ponderosa pines.

Jeffrey pine needleminers eat their way through the middle of the needle, causing the needle to die and turn yellow or, in extreme cases, red. When all the needles on an infested tree turn red the tree has died.

It’s possible the trees will not all die.

Jeffrey pines are more susceptible to needle miners when they are under severe drought stress.