

Kirkwood turns into temporary private slopestyle run

As the chairlifts at Kirkwood Mountain Resort came to a halt this past spring, the Snow Park Technologies snowcats were powering up.

For 20 days, an SPT crew of seven logged 1,200 hours building the slopestyle course of Bobby Brown's dreams. Three years ago the Denver-based professional skier was asking friends, "What's next for slopestyle skiing?" The result is Red Bull Megaslope, a 2,750-foot long course that incorporates six epic features winding across the natural terrain of the mountain.

From start to finish, the course featured:

- 1) A 24-foot single barrel down rail on either side of an eight-foot-wide stair positioned on a downhill angle;
- 2) A 65-foot table with a five-foot step down, built on the high side of the mountain utilizing the natural terrain aligned through a small opening between two groups of trees;
- 3) Gap to 24-foot-long up-box with a gap off to another 24-foot flat-box;
- 4) A cannon to wall ride feature which started with a 24-foot up-box towards the 32-foot-long perforated metal wall-ride with a transition of about six-feet in between;
- 5) A 100-foot step over jump with the takeoff coming out of a gully across the natural fall line with the landing ramp pushed over the edge of the gully;
- 6) The last feature on the course was an 80-foot hybrid table with steeper takeoff and landing angles.

For three days during a seven-day weather window in April, Matchstick Productions filmed Brown's domination of the course. The video was released this week.

Running event combines help for animals

Washoe County's Regional Animal Services will offer a free microchipping clinic at the Summit Mall during the inaugural Sheriff's Office K9 Run on Sept. 28.

The clinic will open at 8am and free microchipping will be available throughout the event.

Pet owners are asked to bring dogs properly leashed and cats in appropriate carriers.

The special clinic is made possible thanks to support from Maddie's Fund and is part of a year-long campaign by Regional Animal Services to provide free microchips for all Washoe County pets.

The Sheriff's K9 Run features a 5K, 10K and a Kids 1 Mile Fun Run. This fundraising event is open to all levels of fitness and all ages. Proceeds will go toward equipment and training needed to support the mission of the Washoe County Sheriff's K9 Unit.

For registration information, go online.

Potential continuing drought has officials on edge

By Matt Weiser

State water officials are urging residents and local water agencies to begin preparing for the possibility that 2014 could be a third dry year.

The California Department of Water Resources issued the cautionary statement last week partly because the state will head into winter with hardly any surplus water in its reservoirs as a cushion against drought. That is because the cushion is being drained off by the dry year now under way.

Problems could be especially acute for small water systems that rely on groundwater, said Jeanine Jones, DWR interstate resources manager.

“Smaller systems don’t have a lot of staff capacity, so often they don’t even do such basic things as regularly monitor groundwater levels or maintain their wells,” Jones said.

Read the whole story

Foodies converge at Northstar

The 28th annual Autumn Food and Wine Festival ended Sept. 8 with more than 30 restaurants, wineries, brewers and distillers from across the region pouring more than 90 wines poured and cooking an assortment of food dishes as diverse as octopus soppressatta, rabbit and wild boar roulade and elk patty melts.

The winners are:

Blind Judges' Awards



At the 2012 Northstar food and wine event Mark Estee gave a butchering demo, this year he won the cooking competition. Photo/LTN file

Best Marriage of Food and Wine

Gold: Village Pizzeria (Meatballs Marinara/Kenwood '10 Zinfandel)

Silver: Moody's Bistro (Rabbit and Wild Boar Roulade/Paul Hobbs '11 Pinot Noir)

Bronze: Jake's on the Lake (Duck and Mushroom Tart/Handley Cellars '09 Pinot Noir)

Best Pairing Food and Beverage

Gold: North Lake Tahoe Catering Gazpacho/Charbay

Best White Wine

Gold: Cristo di Campobello 2012 Grillo, Chard Insolia & Catarotto (Favorotta)

Silver: Long Meadow Ranch 2011 Sauvignon Blanc (Rutherford)

Best Red Wine

Gold: Orin Swift "Abstract" 2011 Red Blend (CA)

Silver: Paul Hobbs 2011 Crossbarn Pinot Noir (Sonoma County)

Bronze: Handley Cellars 2009 Pinot Noir (Anderson Valley)

Best Food

Gold: Village Pizzeria (Meatballs Marinara)

Silver: Moody's Bistro (Rabbit and Wild Boar Roulade)

Bronze: PJ's at Grey Crossing (Roasted Beef Canape)

People's Choice Awards

Best Pairing

Northstar California/Stanger Vineyards

Best Food

Northstar California

Best White Wine

Frank Family Vineyards

Best Red Wine

Stanger Vineyards

Best Other than Wine

Charbay Winery & Distillery

Best Table Presentation

North Tahoe Catering/Charbay Winery & Distillery

Saturday was the competitive event between two top chefs in the region. The Blazing Pans Mountain Chef Cook-Off featured

2012 champion Elsa Corrigan, chef/owner of Squaw Valley's Mamasake, against challenger Mark Estee, chef/owner of Campo Reno. After an hour-plus long battle using goat as the secret ingredient, Estee emerged victorious.

Time to get a flu shot

In preparation for a winter, Barton Health is recommending people get vaccinated for the flu.

Barton also suggests people visit their primary care physician to remain current with your annual physical, receive the flu shot plus other necessary vaccinations.

El Dorado County Health and Human Service agency is also offering six community flu clinics in South Lake Tahoe. Here is clinic schedule.

A hiker's paradise at Homewood ski resort



Quail Lake at Homewood Mountain Lake is inviting to those who can tolerate chilly water. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

HOMEWOOD – Straight up. That’s one way to define what a black diamond hiking trail is.

Ski resort hiking is nothing like being in the forest or a state or national park. The routes don’t follow the contour of the mountain. Switchbacks are unheard of. Instead, many of the trails are straight up or straight down – the better for when snow covers the dirt and skiers are making tracks.

But we didn’t let the uphill climb deter us even though we whined a bit. AJ didn’t seem to mind the vertical ascent as she ran in front of us.

This is the first season the owners of Homewood Mountain Resort have opened the trails to hiking. While the legend on the map rates the trails at “less difficult”, “more difficult” and “most difficult”, the majority falls into the latter. And

one trail we came down was a double black diamond because of the steepness.

We parked at the main parking lot, walked through the neighborhood and started on the Homeward Connector trail.

It doesn't take long for a view of Lake Tahoe to come into view. That's the thing about Homewood – the views of the lake are the best of any ski resort. You are so close. When skiing the face it's like you are going to land in the water.

And while the hiking is free, various signs caution people that the trails are not patrolled. Trail markers are signs attached to a round of wood. This just adds to the funkiness.

Based on being at Homewood on Labor Day weekend it is obvious this West Shore oasis is still not on the radar for many people. We saw only handful of hikers.

More people were at the top of Quail lift where employees were setting up for that night's Farm to Peak dinner. While we don't know how the food was for the five-course dinner, we can attest to the view being outstanding.

Before we reached the top of the lift we had taken the Sunnyside Loop that took us to Quail Lake. Barely a ripple could be seen. The calmness and warm surface temperature lured us to take a dip.

AJ had beaten us to the water. She took a shortcut through the thicket.

Lily pads cover much of the lake. Dragonflies and minnows are the only wildlife we see.

Above us is a wall of ski runs – Main Cirque, 55 Chutes, Wally's Folly and The Shoulder. While patches of color dot the mountain, winter seems so far away as we bask in the sun. The snowmaking machines at various locations, though, remind us opening day is coming soon.

A log is perfectly placed by the lake as a great rest spot to have a bite to eat.

We return to our climb. At times Rubicon Peak stands out above all others.

Most of the trails are soft dirt, wood chips or loose rocks.

We hook up with Homeward Bound trail that then leads to Cedar Ridge trail. Finally we are walking on level ground – not uphill. And this is where those picture postcard views of Tahoe come into view. It's like you are able to see the entire lake – all shores. To the north we see the boats at Sunnyside, to the south we can see the hut on the pier at Chambers Landing. And the smoke has lifted so we can see across to the East Shore.

It's amazing looking down at civilization – the bustling arts and crafts fair in the Homewood parking lot and all the boats on the lake – that we essentially have the mountain to ourselves. We will be back.

But first we must ease down the double black diamond Ore Car trail. This is when those with bad knees would need poles.

The perfect cap to the hike was a cocktail at our favorite bar in Tahoe – West Shore Café.

--

Notes:

- Here is the Homewood hiking map.
- To get there from South Lake Tahoe, go north on Highway 89. The ski resort is on the left in Homewood. Plenty of parking. Trails start from the north and south lodges. The north is the main area. The south is at the end of Tahoe Ski Bowl Way, which is off Highway 89.

Letter: TRPA members don't speak the truth

Publisher's note: *This letter was sent Sept. 3 to the California Senate president pro tem and speaker of the California Assembly.*

Dear Senator Steinberg and Speaker Perez:

This letter is in response to the letter dated Aug. 22, 2013, from the California appointees on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency board addressed to members of the Senate and Assembly. As citizen watchdogs, we are residents, business and property owners and, most importantly, have been deeply engaged in local issues at Lake Tahoe since the formation of the 1987 Regional Plan.

In their letter you are asked to vote for SB630 thereby endorsing the new Regional Plan update. While their rationale for doing so may, at-first-glance sound reasonable, there are serious errors of logic, omissions, and statements that are not grounded in the facts at Lake Tahoe.

Intentional or accidental, their narrative is fiction unsupported by the reality of Tahoe's natural and man-made characteristics.

Supporters of SB630 assert that to preserve the bi-state Compact it must be amended. Yet they insist the amendments don't change the Compact because the amendments are already in

existing law and part of established practices.

The two amendments to the Compact are as follows: The first “requires weighing economic factors in decisions,” and the second “puts the burden of proof on the party who challenges a decision of TRPA.” After chastising the Sierra Club for arguing that these changes will “lead to severe environmental degradation,” the letter affirms that the provisions already exist in the Compact.

The letter states, “The bi-state Compact already requires TRPA to maintain the social and economic health of the basin. There is no way this recitation of existing policy leads to environmental degradation.” Similarly, regarding the burden of proof change, “This, like the other amendment, is nothing more than a re-statement of existing law.”

Why are the two amendments, described in the letter as “modest” and “restatements of existing law,” so necessary to proponents? The answer is obvious to those of us who have been engaged in the RPU process since its inception. These amendments will be used by the TRPA to prioritize economic considerations above environmental ones, turning the intent and purpose of the bi-state Compact upside down.

The Regional Plan update does not simply “update” or correct practical weaknesses in the 1987 plan; it rewrites the plan using the pretensions of “smart growth” to sanction corporate resort development rather than updating the Plan to fulfill the bi-state Compact’s original purpose.

The evidence and proof of this assertion can be found in the process and outcome of recent TRPA approvals of Boulder Bay Resort, Homewood Mountain Resort, and the Highway 28 lane reduction. All three projects presupposed conformance to smart growth planning principles on the surface, but when applied in the small town Lake Tahoe context became mired in controversy.

The projects have not been built yet, but were intended to

inform and guide the RPU. Instead the same misuse of principles that gave rise to them has been carried into the RPU.

The RPU process did not begin in 2011. It began in 2006, with a new agenda initiated by the new executive director of TRPA, John Singlaub. A “new urbanism” vision was imposed on Lake Tahoe communities by TRPA’s new leadership that promised idealistic solutions described in very general but attractive terms.

The concepts, touted as “smart growth” planning principles, including “high density,” “mixed- use,” and “compact development,” aimed at creating “pedestrian friendly, livable, walkable, and sustainable villages,” and “gathering places.” This “smart growth” lexicon, designed to lure and captivate unknowing progressives, was co-opted, misconstrued, and marketed to portray corporate resort developments as nostalgic and quaint “villages.” Such wrapping of environmentally dangerous development in pleasant environmental rhetoric is not new; it is known as “green-washing” and regularly accompanies corporate resort developments from Colorado to California.

“Smart growth” principles originated as a thoughtful alternative to urban sprawl, redirecting such undesirable growth into more efficient and sustainable patterns. While progressive in some locales such as Portland, Oregon, which have large resident populations and suburban sprawl, it doesn’t fit Tahoe. Indeed, the 1987 Regional Plan, consistent with the bi-state Compact, ended sprawl development by prohibiting any further subdivisions of land. Therefore, since Lake Tahoe has no sprawl pressures, densifying town centers does not redirect growth, it simply adds population.

Raising building heights and increasing densities immediately clash with the limited road and utility infrastructure, and most importantly, contravene established environmental

thresholds.

The term “smart growth” as a description of corporate resort development misleads the public into following only one means of economic redevelopment. Most of the small communities around the lake have historically followed a natural and democratic de facto model of redevelopment known as “Main Street.” Communities grow at a pace and scale appropriate to local residents, and from the ground up. In 2006, the practice was ended by local jurisdictions (the counties that border the lake) in favor of TRPA’s high-density corporate-owned and Wall Street financed resort developments.

In 2007, Nevada casino/resort developers and the ski resort industry incorporated the phrases associated with “smart growth” into their clever marketing campaign. These interests captured the TRPA and its Board and gave rise to TRPA’s Community Enhancement Program (CEP). The espoused intent was to incentivize projects that promised to embrace these principles when they actually promoted corporate resort development. When the dust settled, however, only Boulder Bay Resort and Homewood Mountain Resort were approved. Still, the TRPA staff continued the vision, and thereby the deception, by codifying CEP provisions into the RPU.

Finally, in 2011, Nevada passed SB271 which threatened Nevada’s pull-out of the bi-state Compact unless an RPU suitable to their demands was passed by TRPA. After the 2011 Tahoe Summit, TRPA intensified the campaign for an RPU that would satisfy development interests using SB271 as the reason for urgency and a very tight timetable. New staff was hired to generate new policy language and write the corresponding code provisions at a pace and in a manner that made it impossible for meaningful engagement by the environmental community and concerned citizens. This intention was clear and the “Update” process was rammed through.

From late October 2011, through February 2012 TRPA staff

pushed through countless changes to the Codes and Ordinances. We attended all 15 TRPA Board Committee meetings, commented at every meeting, and asked detailed questions which were mostly ignored. At every meeting, TRPA's staff presented policy changes already designed and vetted by resort industry lobbyists behind closed doors. After pressing TRPA about the source of the December 2012 deadline, which was not in SB271, we were finally told it was just an informal and arbitrary deadline.

A bi-state group "consultation process" was initiated at this time ostensibly to hammer out compromises of particular issues. It was comprised of several resort industry proponents and two inexperienced environmentalists who were mostly ignorant of both implementation problems of the 1987 Plan and the history of the RPU process. California's Secretary of Natural Resources Laird arrived late to the scene but just in time, and with orders, to accelerate the campaign and meet the deadline.

The so-called "compromises" were manipulated to appear as compromises; e.g. increasing the level for unilateral local jurisdiction project approvals (in town centers) from 15,000 to 150,000 sq. ft, and then compromising on 90,000 sq. ft. (The largest single story building in Kings Beach is the Safeway Store at only 38,000 sq. ft.) This was hardly a "compromise." Rather, the two young and new environmentalists were manipulated into believing that it was.

The bi-state consultation process ignored entirely the unsustainability of large resort development along with several other central issues because they were not on their agenda for discussion. There was blind faith that local jurisdictions, with their expanded delegation authority over large scale development, would somehow temper their lust for more tax revenue, and willingly sacrifice revenue for accountability to environmental thresholds. The deck was stacked and there was no stopping this freight train. Not

surprisingly, therefore, the letter's statement "... these compromises limited the levels of development ...," has only a tiny sliver of truth, just enough to allow clever people to spin what unknowing people want to hear.

The letter refutes Sierra Club statements that the RPU will urbanize Lake Tahoe by calling them "inaccurate," because there "will be no new tourist accommodation units allocated." But for 11,000 motel units the RPU allows conversion of a 300 sq. ft. motel room into an 1,800 sq. ft. fractional condominium with multiple bedrooms, baths and kitchens. Each unit is considered the same "tourist accommodation unit" (TAU) with the same impacts on the local infrastructure and the environment. Such morphing of TAUs meets the needs of corporate resort developers. The growth is not in number of units but in the allowed size, conversion of entitlements, and transferability of the units.

The letter continues that the RPU will "encourage removal of development from sensitive areas." This provision already exists in the 1987 plan, but it is repackaged to appeal. The more complete truth is that the RPU transfer provisions apply to all property, whether it is developed, pristine forest, sensitive or not. Every tool has been codified to generate additional units for corporate resort developments.

The letter asserts "the RPU is a balanced plan which will facilitate environmental improvement and threshold attainment at Lake Tahoe." The words are what everybody wants to hear, but the evidence undermines it. Achieving environmental thresholds means acknowledging all impacts to physical expansion and staying within the bounds of threshold monitoring. Without objective, consistent, and neutral monitoring of water and air quality indicators, there is no scientific monitoring of over-development.

The TRPA was granted the authority to promulgate laws, enforce the laws, and monitor the results. Unfortunately, however, the

RPU does not strengthen threshold monitoring capability or enforcement. Instead, in addition to having no consequences for failing to reach thresholds, the TRPA continues to control measurement procedures for an easy political spin of negative results. This practice has corrupted the process and led to intense controversy.

The letter promises “bonus units are largely intended for affordable housing so workers can live closer to the job, thereby reducing traffic and air pollution.” The reality for both Boulder Bay and Homewood Mountain Resort is that only a token portion (less than 10 percent) of such units can be called affordable units. Such a figure represents a very small number of employees compared to the total employees, so there is no perceptible reduction of traffic or air pollution. Increased traffic from visitors/owners using the facility coupled with 90 percent of new employees will dwarf the traffic “reduced” by a few onsite affordable “bonus” units.

Finally, the letter spins Greenhouse Gas (GHG) legislation as the “driver” behind high density development at Lake Tahoe. Again, the purpose of the California legislation (AB32, SB375, and SB575) was to encourage concentrations of new development into major metropolitan areas, which would otherwise sprawl beyond existing suburbs. The legislation was never intended to drive the growth of the tourist accommodation industry throughout the Lake Tahoe Basin.

An often overlooked loophole in the GHG calculation is that the basis of measurements is year-round residents. In metropolitan areas the visitor accommodations comprise a small portion of the economy compared to total year round residents. But the Tahoe basin has an unusually high number (about 60 percent) of second/vacation homeowners who are exempt from GHG contributions at the lake because they have already been counted at their primary residences. The resort development industry, consequently, is able to capitalize on this loophole by converting small motel units into shared vacation

condominiums without technically adding any GHG. Summer and winter populations could increase significantly, generating much more GHG, but no violation of state law occurs, and the spin claims a reduction of GHG at Lake Tahoe.

If SB630 passes, thereby endorsing the RPU, and the Compact is amended as TRPA desires, you will see many more very large corporate resort developments. Locals paying already high costs for utilities will suffer further rate hikes to pay for expanding the capacity of water, sewer, and power required by the corporate resorts. The controversies will intensify as the already approved projects are built, exacerbating traffic congestion, and compounding the violation of environmental thresholds. Actions to correct the continued degradation of the lake will be harder to impose as more money and interests are tied to physical expansion and profits to distant owners. It is not new. It has been happening all across the country and Tahoe is simply the latest target.

In closing, you must ask yourself about the source of your current perception of the RPU. Given your multiple responsibilities and limited time, one would presume that you would have done little personal research regarding this topic. Instead, you have believed "reliable sources" such as Secretary Laird, the TRPA's planning staff, other policy makers, and so on. We all do this. The problem is that this can lead to what political psychologists refer to as "groupthink" whereby a perception of reality expands not due to its merit but rather because of those who support it, whether they understand it themselves or not.

History is replete with such follies from the Bay of Pigs, to Iraq's WMD, to the cause and effect economic beliefs that led to America's recent economic collapse. Sometimes it is an accidental error tied to sloppy science or intelligence and sometimes it is a deliberately manufactured lie.

In this case the groupthink is tied to the general acceptance

of a logical fallacy where an underlying assumption goes unquestioned (that “smart growth” principles make up the best template for future growth) in its application to the realities of the Lake Tahoe Basin. The result is that the corporate resort development model ordained by the RPU is inconsistent with the bi-state Compact but few people know it.

The fantasy that sounds terrific becomes believed because reliable people heard it voiced by reliable people. Then cognitive dissonance sets in rejecting any information or science to the contrary.

Indeed, two signatories of the letter are new California TRPA board members, have no direct knowledge of the RPU process or local governmental dynamics in the Tahoe basin surrounding it, yet endorse the letter anyway, evidently to “go along to get along.” That is not the kind of decision making that we want to have governing Lake Tahoe.

Sincerely,

David McClure, president North Tahoe Citizen Action Alliance

Roger Patching, president Friends of Lake Tahoe

Ann Nichols, president North Tahoe Preservation Alliance

Tablet manufacturers target toddlers

By Matt Townsend, Bloomberg

Toddler-safe texting has arrived.

Spurred by burgeoning demand for kid-styled tablets, LeapFrog Enterprises Inc. and VTech Holdings Ltd. revamped their tyke-targeted devices to add features that let three-year-olds send short messages to grandma and even watch online videos without stumbling across websites kids shouldn't see.

"Exposing our children to the Internet at an early age is incredibly valuable, but how do you do it safely?" John Barbour, chief executive officer of Emeryville-based LeapFrog, said in an interview.

By tackling parents' fears about their kids going online, these toymakers are seeking to extend their dominance in a niche category of the booming tablet market that they created two years ago after releasing the first versions of LeapFrog's LeapPad and VTech's InnoTab.

With the added Web features in the recently released \$150 LeapPad Ultra and \$100 InnoTab 3s, they are also presenting more of an alternative to devices from Amazon.com Inc. , Samsung Electronics Co. and Apple Inc. in the larger market for tablets that is projected by researcher IDC to increase 34 percent to 67 million units shipped this year.

Read the whole story

FDA: Arsenic in rice OK to eat

By Sabrina Tavernise, New York Times

WASHINGTON – The Food and Drug Administration announced Friday

that it had found no evidence that current levels of arsenic in rice pose an immediate health risk.

The finding comes two months after the agency proposed new limits on arsenic in apple juice. A public outcry had caused the agency to look at the issue more closely.

The agency tested more than 1,300 types of rice and rice products, like rice cakes and infant cereals, and found that arsenic levels ranged from 3 to 7 micrograms per serving, amounts that the agency said were not hazardous to human health in the short term.

Most rice contains much higher levels of arsenic than apple juice does, said Keeve Nachman, a scientist who studies arsenic in food at the Center for a Livable Future at Johns Hopkins University, but because there is such a wide variety of products made with it, and because it is present at such different levels, the analysis for rice is more complicated.

Read the whole story

Ex-South Tahoe man accused of murder

By Sarah Burge, Press-Enterprise

A former South Lake Tahoe resident was arrested on suspicion of murder last month at Patton State Hospital in San Bernardino after police say he fatally beat a fellow inmate.

George Aaron Carver, 40, who had been serving a criminal commitment at the mental hospital since 2011, was booked into the West Valley Detention Center in Rancho Cucamonga on Aug.

31, jail records show.

The name of the victim, who has been at the hospital for 17 years, was being withheld until his family could be notified, San Bernardino police said.

Read the whole story