Triathlon could impact traffic in Tahoe, Carson, Reno

There will be more athletes on Tahoe and regional roads Sunday because of the second annual Expedition Man Endurance Ultra Triathlon.

Competitors will complete a 2.4-mile swim at Zephyr Cove and transition to a 112-mile bike ride, finishing with a 26.2 mile run in Reno.

The Washoe County Sheriff's Office says to expect traffic delays Aug. 24 from 6am to 11pm occurring from northbound Old U.S. 395N from Carson City to the north end of Eastlake Boulevard. Additionally, some cyclists will make two laps around Washoe Lake by riding southbound on Eastlake to northbound Old U.S. 395 and back around to Eastlake. All cyclists will proceed on Alternate U.S. 395 through Pleasant Valley to the Mt. Rose junction.

For more information on the Expedition Man Endurance Ultra Triathlon, go online.

Calif. taxpayer-funded drug rehab under scrutiny

By Christina Jewett and Will Evans, Center for Investigative Journalism

SACRAMENTO -– California lawmakers ordered an audit this week to examine the extent of fraud in the state's taxpayer-funded drug rehabilitation program and to assess why measures weren't taken to stop it sooner.

The review was spurred by Rehab Racket, a yearlong investigation by the Center for Investigative Reporting and CNN that found widespread forgery and fabrication at alcohol and drug counseling clinics, as well as wide gaps in state and county oversight.

Sen. Ted Lieu, a Los Angeles County Democrat, and Assemblyman Adam Gray, chairman of the Joint Legislative Audit Committee and a Merced Democrat, jointly called for the review of the Medi-Cal-funded program for the poor.

"Ineffective oversight and fraud in the system siphons funds away from legitimate clinics, wastes taxpayer dollars and undercuts the public support for the program," Lieu told the Joint Legislative Audit Committee.

The audit is launching days after the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors unanimously approved its own independent review of the troubled program. That review is expected to probe what powers the county has to sanction and shut down errant clinics, since counties control the clinics' funding.

The state Department of Health Care Services and Department of Justice also are pursuing investigations into dozens of rehab clinics that have been suspended temporarily.

The statewide crackdown spurred by journalists' inquiries has resulted in 43 suspension letters mailed to 116 drug rehabilitation centers, which include headquarters offices and satellite offices, said Norman Williams, spokesman for the Department of Health Care Services.

The closures have hit a growing number of clinics featured in the CIR/CNN reports.

A week before the investigation's publication and airing, authorities quickly suspended operations at Able Family Support, a San Fernando Valley clinic operated by a man with an organized crime conviction that should have disqualified him from running a Medi-Cal clinic.

Another Los Angeles County clinic, Basen Inc., ceased operations this month, according to a former staff member as well as a man who answered Executive Director Bassey Enun-Abara's phone. Former client Vredette Hawkins described the center as a chaotic place where clients were paid $5 to show up. Enun-Abara denied the claim in a June interview.

Earlier this month, Los Angeles authorities also terminated their contract with Pride Health Services, a clinic that former employees said billed for "ghost clients" who didn't show up for treatment.

The contract was cut based on the findings of a June Los Angeles County investigation described in the original CIR/CNN report. An anonymous complaint alleged, in part, that the firm billed for sham clients and services offered on Wednesdays, even though no services were offered that day.

Reporters confirmed in April that Pride did not see clients on Wednesdays during an interview with a receptionist captured on a hidden camera. When the clinic sent its billing to the county several weeks later, it billed for dozens of in-person therapy sessions that day.

County authorities did not find evidence to support the anonymous complaint, after talking to facility staff in May and June. However, days after the Rehab Racket series aired, the county moved on Aug. 2 to cut the contract based on other "serious deficiencies" identified in the June review. The termination notice cited the auditors' discovery of blank medical forms signed by the clinic doctor.

Stephanie Jackson Parnell, a former employee who had filed

another complaint about ghost billing at the clinic in 2009, said she was glad to see Medi-Cal funding cut off for Pride's executive director, Godfrey Nwogene. "That's what he gets," she said.

Nwogene could not be reached at his clinic this week and has not responded to repeated requests for comment.

Following today's committee approval, the Bureau of State Audits will review conduct at Pride and clinics like it at an estimated cost of $316,720.

State Auditor Elaine Howle said auditors will scrutinize clinics in Los Angeles and two other counties to determine the extent of fraudulent activity in the last five years.

"And if the corrective action has not been taken, why is that, what are the reasons that … the state and or the county has for not taking action," Howle said.

Top audits and investigations staff from the state's Medi-Cal agency, the Department of Health Care Services, have been briefed on fraud in the rehab program for at least five years, the CIR/CNN investigation found.

Still, the state department did not begin a review of Drug Medi-Cal until mid-2012, when it gained full authority over the program, said Karen Johnson, the department's chief deputy director. That also was when CIR began filing Public Records Act requests related to the program.

Johnson said authorities welcome the review and plan to cooperate.

"We consider this audit to be an opportunity for us to gain more information about the program's administration and to hear recommendations for improving it," she told lawmakers.

The call for the seven-month state review follows the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors' unanimous request for a

30-day review of the rehabilitation program.

Supervisor Zev Yaroslavsky asked for a county auditor-controller review of Drug Medi-Cal oversight, noting that responsibilities have been “unclear, overly complex, and have continually shifted.”

He also called on the county Department of Public Health to develop a way to rate the severity of problems found during routine clinic reviews and to report significant findings to top management and supervisors.

“How can we do better?” Yaroslavsky said in an interview. “Because it has implications for not only this program, but the other programs we fund.”

Soon after the Los Angeles County review is expected to be completed, state lawmakers are scheduled to take up the matter again during a Sept. 26 Assembly Health Committee hearing.

Letter: Thanks for successful Gatsby Festival

To the community,

We had a wonderful Great Gatsby Festival again this year. We hope that some of you made it out for some of the festivities. If not, we hope you will come out next year.

The tour of the house is a unique experience during Gatsby and so much fun. So be sure to come out and play with us next time, 1920s style.

We want to thank our local businesses that donated to our

silent auction. We made about $3,000 from our silent auction and that money goes directly back to the Tallac Historic Site.

Sincerely,

Tami Africa, assistant site director Tallac Historic Site

Smoke to linger in Lake Tahoe



Smoke is providing for some spectacular sunsets in Lake Tahoe. Photo/Anjayla Monterastelli

Typical Tahoe blue skies have been replaced by gray, smoky skies that could linger as fires outside the basin rage on.

Health officials say people with heart or lung disease, older adults, and children should reduce prolonged or heavy exertion while the smoke is so thick.

The Rim Fire near Yosemite is what is inundating the South Shore. That fire is raging, with firefighters having lost ground overnight. The fire has consumed more than 100,000 acres is 2 percent contained. It started Aug. 17. The cause is under investigation.

The American Fire near Foresthill has been bringing smoke to the North Shore and Truckee for days. That fire has consumed 20,232 acres and is 66 percent contained. Crews expect to have it fully contained Sept. 1.

– Lake Tahoe News staff report

Sinkhole on I-80 near Truckee slows travel

A sinkhole on Interstate 80 has closed the No. 1 lane in both directions near Donner Pass Road in Truckee.

The sinkhole is in the center median.

Motorists can expect delays Aug. 23 heading toward the Sacramento and Bay areas as well as the Lake Tahoe-Reno region. Caltrans and a contractor are at the scene to assess the situation and then perform necessary repairs. There is no estimated time to complete emergency repairs and reopen the closed lanes.

The sinkhole developed during a paving operation early Friday morning. The sinkhole is estimated to be approximately 3 feet in diameter and more than 8-feet deep.

The cause is unknown at this time.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• The San Francisco Comedy Festival will be at MontBleu in Stateline on Sept. 14 at 9pm. Tickets are $25.

• Ground breaking for the Truckee River Legacy Trail Phase 3B is Aug. 26 at 4pm. For more info, click on the flyer.

• The Strawberry Music Festival this weekend has been canceled because of the Rim Fire.

• Tahoe Donner is bringing Jerry Tindell, an accomplished horse and mule trainer, to the equestrian center Sept. 6-8 to conduct an introduction/intermediate horsemanship clinic.

• Kathy Long, the park and facilities manager for the North Tahoe Public Utility District, has retired.

Tahoe officials not worried about West Slope housing boom

By Kathryn Reed

No one knows what the economic impact to all of El Dorado County would be if 7,000 houses are built on the West Slope.

But more people would definitely further clog Highway 50, the

main artery to the South Shore. Traffic is regularly choked getting out of South Lake Tahoe through Meyers on Sundays and bottlenecks again in Placerville with the traffic lights. The reverse happens on Fridays.

Tahoe tourism advocates for the past few years have tried to urge people to travel at non-peak times to help avoid the congestion and lessen the time it takes them to get to and from Tahoe. At the same they have urged hotels and restaurants and others to entice people to come earlier and stay later.

“Perhaps this presents a viable opportunity to contemplate public transit from outside the basin,” Carol Chaplin, executive director of Lake Tahoe Visitors Authority, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The county could have helped the highway situation, but opted earlier to allocate Highway 50 funds to other areas.

Mike Applegarth with the County Administrator’s Office said the county has no tool to study the economic impacts of the housing because there are so many variables.

He told *Lake Tahoe News* that it is doubtful property taxes would cover all of the services impacted by the new development.

“But with homes comes commercial development. There is not a lot of development left on the West Slope. I think we have 1,500 acres of remaining commercial left,” Applegarth said. “Whether retail establishments generate a lot of sales taxes, it’s hard to say.”

Property tax revenue would definitely increase, especially with the new housing to be assessed at a higher rate than most of the older properties on the market.

But there is also the toll that can be taken on roads, schools, fire districts, sheriff’s office, and other

infrastructure and county departments.

The county's 2014 General Plan allows for 21,000 more houses. The General Plan for the most part covers areas outside of the Lake Tahoe Basin. The basin is covered by the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency Regional Plan and community or area plans for specific sections.

"These projects sound like they will create quite a bit of a fight between growth, smart-growth and rural advocates, putting pressure on the El Dorado County supervisors to balance these competing interests. The arguments for and against are the same arguments that have been waged in most locations throughout the west for many years," Nancy Kerry, South Lake Tahoe city manager, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

She doesn't see the housing alone negatively impacting the South Shore, but added that if jobs that pay well are part of the equation, then an impact would likely be inevitable.

El Dorado County Supervisor Norma Santiago, who represents Tahoe, was not available for comment.

"From a tourism standpoint, it won't drive much in the way of room nights as the West Slope would be a day trip market for the most part," Chaplin said. "With that said, it could benefit our recreation providers and generate sales tax through purchase of activities, retail and restaurant food-beverage."

While the Lake Tahoe South Shore Chamber of Commerce is supposed to represent a different constituency than LTVA, chamber CEO B Gorman said, "I think (Chaplin) covered all that I would have said."

Then there is also the matter of 10,000 houses that are slated to go in next door in Folsom – which is in Sacramento County.

Opinion: Time for Tahoe to act, not just react

By Garry Bowen

The summer of 1997 was indeed a heady time: coffee with Deputy Secretary of Agriculture Richard Rominger at the Lone Eagle Grill in Incline; a lawn meeting with Assistant Secretary of Agriculture Jim Lyons at Tallac, entertaining an invitation to join an upcoming panel on Forest Health, the result of my having written a white paper to Vice President Al Gore's domain while in the White House (the Office of Environmental Quality) on behalf of both of Tahoe's Resource Conservation Districts, offspring's of the USDA Forest Service's "first cousin", the Natural Resource Conservation Service.

To this day, the NRCS and the RCD serve the Tahoe basin very well, in so many ways across the community, as well as most of the other local agency efforts. But while the community needs to be reminded of this important ongoing work at various times, it is Monday's visit by Al Gore that will be the subject of yet another reminder.



Garry Bowen

Those "heady times" came to mind at Sand Harbor on Aug. 19 as it became apparent to me that we have been missing the

enthusiasm with which he spoke that morning, in spite of the emerging danger that he's been so battered by in pointing out. Denying that climate change is now so obviously upon us seems to make the dwindling numbers even more vociferous, and the squeaky wheel still gets way too much credence, to our continued detriment.

When Gore can attest that "it is time to renew our commitment . . . to go the rest of the way," he was not just talking about our local efforts at reestablishing the hallowed clarity of Lake Tahoe, but more in the vein of his other comments about climate change in referring to the release of "90 million tons of CO2 that will be released today" into the sky like it's an "open sewer". That his enthusiasm leads to "hope … tempered by a realization that much more has to be done" really reflected that from now on, Lake Tahoe could in fact "be a symbol, not in name only, but to truly and genuinely play a vital role in inspiring the (rest of) the world" as to the importance of preserving the systems that support all of life, not just the local budgetary concerns of contributing to any public/private partnership – for the time being.

He said the original presidential summit, all those years ago, "was accomplished without partisanship or ideology" and that Lake Tahoe still retains the "chance to move beyond that". He also went beyond the now-regular boundary of each year's annual summit by upping the ante in saying that Tahoe should now think about spawning an annual global event with "awe-inspiring and demonstrable" examples of the "cooperation" that makes him so proud of being a part of bringing attention to Lake Tahoe in the latter part of the last century. "Awe-inspiring and demonstrable" examples are, of course, a missing ingredient.

Unfortunately, the word cooperation has to be "in quotes" for now, as the necessary community spirit to match Gore's enthusiasm, vim and vigor for his subject matter is not yet as readily apparent as needed, in that local dealings are still

not so much about change as they are about maintaining whatever the power structure thinks of itself as "leading" – bringing the slippage back up to par, instead of instituting the types of change that would suit them better. Joanne Marchetta of TRPA is right: "it will take (much) more than growth control and design standards for new buildings": it will take individual recognition and responsibility to meet or exceed those standards and to sincerely care enough about our surroundings that there is active participation in creating truly sustainable lifestyles … life will soon depend upon it on unheard-of levels.

Active participation means that Lake Tahoe not just be thought of in terms of its natural beauty (all of nature has a beauty of its own) or as a function of any "picture-postcard mentality" (a term coined by an economist with the Forest Service Research Station), currently favored for real-estate valuations.

For Gore's energetic statements from Monday, Tahoe will have to learn of the subtle (but profound) distinction between aiming for "sustainable communities", seemingly just a step or two from where we now find ourselves, and in learning the certain significance of scientific sustainability in restoring life-giving processes.

To truly match Gore's enthusiastic support in thinking of Tahoe as a "model for combating global warming" (surely we'll want to think of ourselves that way, but then conflate and deny what it will actually take to do so). The ability-to-sustain will actually have to be taught, but fortunately there are easy ways to do that – aside from any mere program that the powers-that-be think will be sufficient and politically correct.

Even the mighty EPA decided in late 2011 that our global problems are so daunting that no individual program will work, so they have called for sustainability to be "embedded" in

everything they do, from administration, to policy, to implementation. If Gore's suggestion is to be realized and we think about becoming a global beacon for answers, then we'd better create better questions as to how to "get there", so Tahoe does not trip itself up in trying to be what others already know they're not: sustainable.

"Going the rest of the way" does not mean "more-of-the-same (just a little different)" – it means embracing the tremendous work of the Sustainable Sites Initiative, the U.S. Green Building Council, the International Living Future Institute, and the very people who work every day wanting to make a difference right here in the Basin and in all of the outdoor world – Tahoe is not in a vacuum, but it can resonate with a renewed emphasis of using the resources it gets with the very best leverage possible – that's an important beacon of its' own – "good enough for government" is not anymore – but can be.

As William McDonough, the "mastermind of sustainable development" said, "it will take more than simply being 'less bad' ", or even Jerry Garcia (Grateful Dead), "picking between the lesser of two evils is still evil".

The foregoing is an adequate reflection of what's been learned in the interim 15 years since those heady days headed up by Senator Reid's orchestration of a first-time visit anywhere by a sitting president and vice president, and the ongoing support of both our states' senatorial contingent – but Gore's rallying cry early this week calls for much more than "more of the same (but better)" as Marchetta implies.

The world is actually waiting for such a leadership example; why not Lake Tahoe? It is most decidedly not "the sustainability powerhouse of the nation", but could be, with the right motivational direction – do we dare extend ourselves to meet such a challenge?

It took 16 years for Gore to stir us up once more – can we stand another decade or more again? I think not.

Garry Bowen has a 50-year connection to the South Shore, with an immediate past devoted to global sustainability, on most of its current fronts: green building, energy and water efficiencies, and public health. He may be reached at tahoefuture@gmail.com or (775) 690.6900.

Teen court looking for participants

The El Dorado County Teen Court program in Placerville is recruiting student participants for the fall program.

Students in grades 8-12 are invited to sign up for the Teen Court volunteer training, scheduled for Sept. 11 from 6-8pm in El Dorado County Superior Court, located at 495 Main St. in Placerville.

After completing the mandatory training, teens will serve as court personnel for real cases in which a minor has committed an offense, admitted the offense, and chosen to be judged for sentencing by his/her peers.

Teen Court hearings will begin Oct. 2 and continue through May 2014. Hearings will be on Wednesday nights; a calendar with hearing dates will be handed out to each student during the training.

For more information about Teen Court or the volunteer training, call Austin at (530) 621.6380.

Obama trying to lower the cost of college

By Tamar Lewin, New York Times

President Obama announced a set of ambitious proposals on Thursday aimed at making colleges more accountable and affordable by rating them and ultimately linking those ratings to financial aid.

A draft of the proposal, obtained by the New York Times and likely to cause some consternation among colleges, shows a plan to rate colleges before the 2015 school year based on measures like tuition, graduation rates, debt and earnings of graduates, and the percentage of lower-income students who attend. The ratings would compare colleges against their peer institutions. If the plan can win Congressional approval, the idea is to base federal financial aid to students attending the colleges partly on those rankings.

“All the things we’re measuring are important for students choosing a college,” a senior administration official said. “It’s important to us that colleges offer good value for their tuition dollars, and that higher education offer families a degree of security so students aren’t left with debt they can’t pay back.”

Obama hopes that starting in 2018, the ratings would be tied to financial aid, so that students at highly rated colleges might get larger federal grants and more affordable loans. But that would require new legislation.

Read the whole story