Pilot dies in S. Tahoe plane crash; 1 person survives



One person died, one survived after this plane crashed July 22 near South Lake Tahoe. Photo/Kathryn Reed

Updated 4:25pm:

By Kathryn Reed

The 67-year-old pilot of a single-engine plane crashed moments after taking off Monday from Lake Tahoe Airport.

Steven Lefton's wife, Karen Lefton, was the lone passenger of the 1963 Mooney. She was conscious when Calstar airlifted her from the meadow near Golden Bear to Renown Medical Center in Reno. She is expected to recover from her injuries.

The Palo Alto couple arrived at the South Lake Tahoe airport on July 18. They were taking off about 11:15am July 22 when

the plane banked to the right, lost altitude and crashed in a wooded area about three-quarters of a mile to the east of the airport.

“It’s a fairly powerful plane, but on a hot day like this it’s fairly easy to lose density altitude and have problems,” El Dorado County sheriff’s Lt. Pete Van Arnum told Lake *Tahoe News*.

Another plane in the area saw the four-seater flying low and heard the crash. Then the jet picked up the emergency beacon signal of the downed plane. From there Calstar was able to locate the crash site from the air.

The plane crashed into trees and flipped. It was resting upside down in a crumpled heap.

Beth Frisby, a flight nurse with Calstar, was the first person on the scene because she was on a walk in the area. She called her husband, EDSO Deputy Damian Frisby, who was able to track her location via GPS on the phones.

The plane was still running when Frisby came upon the crash site.

She was assessing the occupants of the plane as crews arrived.

“A lot of fuel was leaking, so we were concerned when we got here,” Van Arnum said.

He said it was lucky the plane did not explode or cause much of a fire.

Investigators from the Federal Aviation Administration arrived within hours from Reno and National Transportation Safety board are expected Tuesday from Seattle. Guards will be onsite until investigators are done and the plane can be hauled away.

Parents expect to spend less on school supplies

By Megan Kowalski, USA Today

Despite higher prices for back-to-school needs, students and parents will spend nearly 8 percent less this season than in 2012, according to a survey out Thursday from the National Retail Federation.

Parents will save by shopping earlier for sales, shopping online and by having children re-use items bought in last year's booming back-to-school season, the NRF says.

Average back-to-school spending will be $635, down from last year's average of $689, the NRF says. Back-to-college spending also will shrink this year, the NRF says, to an average of $837 for supplies – including apparel, electronics and dorm furnishings – down from $907 last year. It estimates total U.S. spending will be $26.7 billion.

The back-to-school drop comes despite a 7.3 percent increase in the cost of school supplies, fees and activities estimated by Columbus, Ohio-based Huntington Bank's annual "Backpack Index," also out Thursday.

The cost of back-to-school shopping could increase 36 percent from last year if students add a midprice $300 tablet to purchases, according to the Backpack Index.

A new study from educational services company CourseSmart found 35 percent of college students now own a tablet, up from 7 percent in its 2011 survey.

Squaw Valley man must pay to remove river cable

By George Warren, News 10

A federal court judge has ordered a Squaw Valley daredevil to pay $4,000 to cover the cost of removing a mile-long steel cable across the north fork of the American River.

Mike Wilson, 27, is described by some as an action sports superstar. In one popular YouTube video, he performs a quadruple back flip from a 99-foot cable swing over Lake Tahoe.

Although Wilson thrives on risky behavior, the federal government said his cable over the canyon could have killed somebody else. The quarter-inch cable is virtually invisible to a pilot.

“It could have ended tragically,” said Jeff Horn of the Bureau of Land Management. “What if a helicopter had flown into this. What if a plane had flown into this. It would have been bad. Most helicopter crashes don’t end well.”

Another YouTube video, posted by one of Wilson’s friends, shows how the cable works. Wilson and his friends would “zipline” out to the middle, and then drop by parachute to the river 2,000 feet below.

Four days after the Bureau of Land Management discovered the cable in February 2012, the agency ordered Wilson to cut it down.

Since then, the cable has remained draped over trees and rocks in the canyon below.

In a one-day federal court trial in April 2013, Wilson was convicted of a single misdemeanor for an unauthorized improvement on public land and ordered to pay $4,000 to the BLM to remove the cable.

“It is still a hazard,” Horn said. “It’s about 250 feet maybe, give or take a few, above the canyon.”

Helicopters capable of lifting the cable out of the canyon won’t be available until after fire season so the cable will likely remain there until then.

Study: Wages vary based on history with smoking

By Khadeeja Safdar, Wall Street Journal

Former smokers earn higher wages than smokers and people who have never smoked, according to new research.

In a working paper published by the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta, research economists Julie L. Hotchkiss and M. Melinda Pitts studied the relationship between smoking and wages. Using data from the Tobacco Use Supplement to the U.S. Census Bureau’s Current Population Survey over the period of 1992 to 2011, the economists found that people who had quit smoking for at least a year earned higher wages than smokers and people who had never smoked. The data shows that nonsmokers, which include never smokers and former smokers, bring in about 95 percent of the hourly wages of former smokers.

Smokers, on the other hand, are not rewarded as much in the workplace. They earned about 80 percent of nonsmokers’ wages.

Even one cigarette a day triggers a wage gap between smokers and nonsmokers, the economists write. “Smoking erodes the value of your human capital in the labor market,” said Pitts.

Are tobacco users earning less because smoking reduces their productivity? Hotckiss and Pitts didn’t find evidence for this. The two economists tested the relationship between wages and smoking intensity and found that the frequency at which people smoke doesn’t significantly affect their earnings. “The idea is that if the productivity was affected by smoking, then heavier smokers would have a much larger wage gap. We didn’t find support for this hypothesis,” said Pitts.

They determined that differences in the characteristics of smokers and nonsmokers, such as educational attainment, as well as unmeasured factors such as an employer’s tolerance to smoking behavior, are mostly driving the wage gap. They noted that education level was the largest contributing variable. Nonsmokers tend to be more educated, are less likely to have spouses who smoke and live in states where cigarette prices are higher than smokers.

The findings suggest that the characteristics of former smokers are more highly rewarded in the labor market than those of smokers and people who have never smoked. “It takes a special person to quit an addictive behavior, and there is a higher reward for smoking cessation than not ever starting it,” said Pitts. “I think the qualities of persistence, patience and everything else that goes along with being able to quit are valuable to employers.”

Snippets about Lake Tahoe



• Live at Lakeview will be running a live stream of every Thursday night concert.

• Squaw and Alpine CEO Andy Wirth has joined the Reno-Tahoe Airport Authority board.

• Homewood Mountain Resort and Sugar Bowl have joined Ski Lake Tahoe as associate members.

• Go online to find out when you can ride BlueGo, the South Shore bus service, for free.

• Unity at the Lake’s Spiritual Leaders, Stew and Hillary Bittman, were ordained as interfaith ministers in Riverside Church in New York City on June 9.

Tahoe Tails – Adoptable Pets in South Lake Tahoe



Zion

Zion is one of three little dogs at the shelter right now who look like they are siblings – but they are not related.

Zion is a Chihuahua mix who is a little shy at first, but he warms up quickly and is loving and gentle. He loves other dogs, is fine with cats and seems to like kids. His favorite activity is snuggling.

Zion is neutered, microchipped, and vaccinated. He is at the El Dorado County Animal Services shelter in Meyers, along with many other dogs and cats who are waiting for their new homes. Go to www.petfinder.com to see photos and descriptions of all pets at the shelter.

Call (530) 573.7925 for directions, hours, and other information about adopting a pet.

– Karen Kuentz

Thunderbird Lodge – a glimpse into old Tahoe

By Kathryn Reed

INCLINE VILLAGE – Along the East Shore of Lake Tahoe is one of Nevada's most famous houses that belonged to a man few have heard of.

The Thunderbird Lodge was George Whittell's escape from the world and especially people.

And while Howard Hughes and William Randolph Hearst Jr. were his peers – especially in terms of wealth – Whittell did not leave a legacy like those men did. He was a bit eccentric and liked to keep to himself.

What he left is a swath of undeveloped land along with a house made of native wood and rock that sits on a pristine piece of Lake Tahoe shoreline.



The Thunderbird Lodge in Incline Village is open for tours throughout the summer. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Whittell was born into San Francisco money and never had to work. He did serve in World War I.

Against his parents' wishes he joined the Barnum and Bailey Circus. His love of big animals continued long after that stint. He had a barn built at Thunderbird for his elephants that had Dutch doors so they would have a lake view. There was even a fireplace to keep them warm.

But the climate in and elevation of Tahoe didn't suit these

animals; so back to his Woodside estate they went.

Bill the Lion, though, was known to roam the grounds in Tahoe. And stories are that overnight guests might wake to a big kiss from the wild cat.

At one point Whittell owned 40,000 acres on the Nevada side of Tahoe that included 24 miles of shoreline. After the 1929 stock market crash the Carson & Tahoe Lumber and Fluming Company and other landholders needed cash. Whittell was able to buy much of it for 6 cents an acre.

His property went from the state line on the North Shore to Zephyr Cove. That is how Whittell High School got its name.

Construction on the estate began in 1936. In the 1980s Jack Dreyfus bought the property and added on. However, at the time the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency said the construction could not be historical in nature. That policy has been reversed, and if the addition were built now, it would have to match the original architecture.

Having the building be of two distinct time periods allows the visitor to know what is old and what is new. Part of the new is built on top of what was a deck for Whittell.

The old is not so spectacular inside – especially the living area. What is interesting is the long tunnel that is rock lined that has a couple escape routes. One is to the game room. Docents said Whittell would disappear from poker games if he were losing.

A small, dark room in the tunnel is not on the plans for the house. Samples of the soot from the ceiling revealed this was where opium was smoked.

The tunnel also leads to the boathouse where the Thunderbird yacht is moored.

In 1939, John Hacker, a Naval architect, designed the vessel

to resemble Whittell's personal DC-2 aircraft and his many Duesenbergs automobiles. It has two vintage V-12 Allison Aircraft engines. Jet fuel is available at the Tahoe City Marina.

When first built the Thunderbird cost $87,000. That is about $3.3 million in today's dollars. It is 55-feet long and made of Honduran mahogany.

To charter the boat it costs $5,000 an hour. It gets one-quarter mile per gallon.

Today the Thunderbird Preservation Society owns the estate, which includes about 6 acres, the house and five cottages, and the yacht.

Susan Grove, lodge manager, said the society is trying to change its image from being elitist to being more inclusive. One way to do that is to create a $20 million endowment ($6 million is in the bank) so from that pot the annual expenses could be paid. She said it costs $1 million to maintain the site, the boat, pay off the loan on the boat and pay the few employees. (Most of the work is done by volunteers – even the executive director works for free.)

The Dreyfus side of the estate is where the bulk of the fundraising events take place – from cocktail parties for society members to weddings to winemaker dinners. This room is what was their great room. Walls of windows look onto the shimmering lake.

Docents said the Dreyfuses never spent the night at the house because they believed it was haunted.

The Dreyfus kitchen has been changed a bit so it is a working commercial kitchen. The Whittell kitchen looks much like it would have decades ago with the old appliances. But it was functional, with an island that has a marble top.

Earlier this month the original fountain was finally restored at a cost of $300,000. But what remains is an odd looking addition from the Dreyfus-period.

“It’s expensive to keep things up. We want to do things historically accurate,” Grove told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Whittell had three wives, but no children. When he died in 1969 he left the bulk of his estate, which was valued at more than $300 million, to animal rights organizations.

It was in 1999 that the preservation society got the Thunderbird Lodge. Tours began in 2002.

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Notes:

• Tours are $39 if starting by land. There are also tours via the old Tahoe out of the Tahoe Keys Marina and kayak tours starting in Tahoe City.

• Tours are May-October.

• More info is online.

• The Thunderbird Yacht will be at South Tahoe Wooden Boat Classic at Tahoe Keys Marina July 26-27. More info is online.

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Opinion: Feds strangled the Nevada Fire Safe Council

By Elwood L. Miller

The dangerous fire season 2013 is well under way with dozens of large fires burning across the West driving people from their neighborhoods and reducing their homes to ashes. However, a critical ally in the mission to protect homes and communities throughout Nevada and the Lake Tahoe Basin is noticeably absent. One of this nation's most effective community protection organizations, the Nevada Fire Safe Council, is nowhere to be seen. What happened?

With enthusiastic support of firefighting and emergency personnel, the Nevada Fire Safe Council was created in 1999 to bring citizens into a working partnership to achieve both enhanced community protection and firefighter safety. For well over a decade, the Nevada Fire Safe Council organized over 5,000 volunteers in 135 community chapters to increase defensible space and create thousands of acres of fuel breaks where firefighters could aggressively, but safely fight the flames. In national and international conferences the Nevada Fire Safe Council was repeatedly hailed as the model for unparalleled accomplishment in the arena of community protection.

In the summer 2011 a federal investigation into a fallacious complaint inadvertently revealed missteps in the council's management of grant funds. Upon notification, the council's volunteer board of directors took immediate action to address the financial tracking and control deficiencies. Follow-up investigations by no less than 15 federal agents relentlessly rifled through every financial document and file never finding anything other than a lack of adherence to the complexity of federal rules and procedures. No money was found to be

missing. During these repetitious inquiries the council's citizen volunteers responded to every question and fulfilled every demand for information. Every dollar received by the council was spent to advance the mission of community protection. However, final reports did reveal inadequate oversight and a lack of proper control on the part of the federal agencies that actually facilitated the errors and made the agencies complicit in the failings of the council.

Both the Nevada State office of the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service office at Lake Tahoe reacted to the investigations by refusing to release approved funds resulting in financial starvation and a filing for bankruptcy as the coup-de-grace for the Fire Safe Council. Refusal to release funds also stranded 51 contractors with $3.4 million in unpaid, legitimate invoices. Many of these contractors represent small companies that in turn, were forced into bankruptcy. Unpaid invoices causing continuing hardship were also held by fire districts forcing a reduction firefighting capacity.

Both the BLM and the US Forest Service failed to honor their commitments to preserve the Council and its network of community leaders and dedicated citizen volunteers. Reasonable people freed from bureaucratic fetters with a common mission to protect communities could have reached a workable solution. Bankruptcy proceedings are now stalled after incessant delays. Nevada's congressional delegation tried to help but to no avail. It is very sad that the Gordian knot consisting of finger pointing and a tortuous web of rules and regulations took precedent over community safety. Nevada has lost its highly acclaimed and singularly successful grass roots preemptive firefighting entity. Evidently the Nevada Fire Safe Council's extraordinary record of success was not deemed worthy of an effort to untie the knot.

Elwood L. Miller was the executive director of the Nevada Fire Safe Council from January 2002 until April 2005.

Red Hawk on the road to financial recovery

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

Red Hawk Casino’s debts are so crushing, its tribal owner once warned the venue might close and the Legislature had to provide a bailout plan.

Now the Shingle Springs casino could be on the verge of completing a state-assisted financial makeover that would remove many of the doubts about its viability.

If costs are reduced as expected, Red Hawk’s “prospects are pretty good,” said Ken Adams, a gambling industry consultant in Reno.

But even if it stabilizes its finances, Adams said Red Hawk will never approach the profitability of the area’s most successful casino, Thunder Valley in Lincoln. Red Hawk’s Highway 50 location is too far from Sacramento to draw the volume of business seen at Thunder Valley.

Read the whole story

Suspected drunken driver

takes out utility pole

A former South Lake Tahoe man who now lives in Colfax was taken to Barton Memorial Hospital on Sunday night after the vehicle he was driving crashed into a utility pole at Al Tahoe Boulevard and Pioneer Trail.

“I followed him from Rite-Aid and could not believe this person would drive a vehicle under his condition,” a witness told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Justin Hartinger, 38, was the driver of the Toyota SUV. At about 7:30pm July 21 he was taken to the hospital and issued a citation for driving under the influence.

— Lake Tahoe News staff report