4.6 mil. Californians expected to travel this weekend

By Mark Glover, Sacramento Bee

High heat and gas prices apparently will not deter Californians from enjoying the first summer holiday of the year.

AAA projects that more than 4.6 million Californians plan to travel at least 50 miles or more during the three-day Independence Day weekend. That represents a 1.5 percent increase over 2013.

Read the whole story

Fireworks injuries, sales on the rise

By Steven Overly, Washington Post

It’s all pomp and patriotism until someone burns a limb.

The number of fireworks-related injuries soared to their highest level in more than a decade last year, according to a U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission report released last week. An estimated 11,400 injuries were reported during 2013, a staggering 31 percent climb compared to 8,700 injuries reported the year before.

Bob Adler, the commission's acting chairman, said a direct cause for the jump is difficult to determine. On the one hand, he said, states such as Michigan, Maine and Arizona made fireworks more accessible to consumers. In other states, however, people may be taking safety for granted regardless of regulations.

"My first hope is that it's just a fluke and an aberration," Adler said. But "what we've seen is an expansion in the ability for members of the public to get access to fireworks, and that's not necessarily a good thing."

The 44-page report also details eight deaths in 2013 caused by head and chest trauma, or house fires that resulted from mishandled fireworks.

Still, the sudden rise in injuries may be a cause for concern as the nation prepares for the Fourth of July holiday and families load up on sparklers, bottle rockets and other backyard pyrotechnics. The American Pyrotechnics Association in Bethesda, Md., predicts sales of consumer fireworks will exceed $675 million in 2014, an all-time record.

Read the whole story

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Ted Jackson and Luke Anderson have been promoted to engineer at Lake Valley Fire Protection District.

• Joe Craven and his 12-year-old daughter, Hattie, are putting on a music workshop July 9 from 3-5pm at Valhalla on the South Shore. He will put on a concert that night at 7:30 at the Boathouse Theatre. For more info and tickets, go online.

• Hot August Nights returns to South Lake Tahoe July 25-26. Cars will be at Heavenly Village and on Ski Run Boulevard.

• Sue Fairley is Barton Health's vice president of Nursing and Ancillary Services. She replaces Mary Bittner, who retired in April.

• There will be a boat parade July 4 starting at 11:45am at Commons Beach in Tahoe City.

Wood pulp not unusual in fast foods

By Jenn Harris, Los Angeles Times

When you fantasize about a classic burger, you think of a juicy patty, your favorite toppings, a warm bun and maybe a little bacon. Chances are you aren't dreaming about eating any wood pulp.

But if you eat at some of the nation's top fast-food restaurants, you could be eating wood pulp. Burger King, McDonald's, Taco Bell, Carl's Jr. and Wendy's all have items on their menus that contain this ingredient.

Instead of seeing wood pulp listed in the nutrition information, you'll see cellulose. It's a common food additive, made of tiny pieces of wood pulp and plant fibers.

Cellulose also can be listed by some of its many other names, as noted by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration, as powdered cellulose, alpha-cellulose, flour cellulose, cellulose fiber, Microcrystalline cellulose, cellulose casing and regenerated cellulose.

Read the whole story

‘Servant of 2 Masters’ at Valhalla

South Tahoe High grad Ethan Niven returns to the South Shore this month to direct Valhalla’s first theater production of the season.

“The Servant of Two Masters” is a family-friendly comedy. It is a high-flung/low-brow comedy about a hungry servant who hatches a scheme to double his wages (and his meals) by serving two masters at once.

It will run the weekends of July 10-13 and July 17-20 at Valhalla’s Boathouse Theatre.

Click here for times, prices and to buy tickets.

Valhalla is located at the Tallac Historic Site located two miles past the intersection of highways 50 and 89 next to Camp Richardson.

Flowers create colorful path to Showers Lake



Showers Lake is a popular overnight spot for PCT hikers. Photos/Kathryn Reed

By Kathryn Reed

Showers Lake is so idyllic that it is one of the more sought after resting points for hikers on the Pacific Crest Trail.

The terrain is flat, which is ideal for pitching a tent. While the water is colder than Lake Tahoe, one guy said it felt warm to him because he had been swimming at lakes even higher in elevation. Showers Lake is at 8,560 feet.

Kim and Susan arrived before us. A woman asked them if they minded nudity. Nope. And off she went for a skinny dip.

We had hiked in with Lisa and Ken, whom we unexpectedly ran into at the trailhead. Lisa likes the start of the hike because it doesn't seem like the typical Tahoe trek because of the expansiveness, greenery and volcanic rock.

Sue and I had to agree with her impression.

There were plenty of wildflowers to gawk at on Saturday, though Lisa and Kim – two veterans of this hike – said what we were seeing was nothing compared to a non-drought year. After the last heavy snow year there were flowers reaching 6-feet into the air. Nothing was close to that this year.

It's bound to be a short wildflower season this year because of the lack of moisture for consecutive years. Plus, the temperatures are higher than normal in and around the Lake Tahoe Basin. It's supposed to remain into the 80s into next week, with the hottest day being Sunday at 89 degrees in South Lake Tahoe.

Still, Kim counted 23 flowers plus a puffball, which is a fungus. She said it's edible, but would only choose to eat it if she had to.

Already the unusual monument plant has flowered and what's left is a tall green stalk that looks out of place in the Sierra.

Some of the flowers along the way included: lupine, Indian paintbrush, bluebells, phlox, sulphur buckwheat, scarlet gilia, Alpine daisy, groundsel flower and larkspur.

From the top of the ridge we turn around to see the runs at Kirkwood Mountain Resort.

In front of us and to the right is Meiss Meadow, which hasn't dried out yet. Meiss Lake is to the left and then Round Top Lake with its distinctive buttress. And then Lake Tahoe is to the far left.

Just below the ridge is a strip of snow that AJ laps at to quench her thirst.

The descent into Showers Lake is a little steep. The rocks on the soft dirt make paying attention necessary. It’s the one spot where poles would have been nice.

Boulders around the lake are perfect lunch and lounging spots. A fisherman has waded out to one of the rock islands in hopes of catching a more substantive meal. He didn’t seem to be having much luck.

And while we had the trail to ourselves, the lake became crowded by the afternoon. I’m guessing that midweek would be the most tranquil time to visit.

There are multiple ways to reach Showers Lake. Deciding which route to take will depend on how much time you have, how far you want to go, and if you want a one-way or round-trip excursion. Going in from Echo Summit you will be on the Tahoe Rim Trail part of the time. Starting at Big Meadow trailhead, the trek goes through Meiss Meadow. Carson Pass has a few connections that lead to Showers Lake.

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Editorial: Supreme Court puts women, workers at risk

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is form the June 26, 2014, Los Angeles Times.***

The U.S. Supreme Court faced the challenging task of weighing one person’s right to free speech against another’s right to

be protected from harassment when it reviewed a Massachusetts law requiring 35-foot buffer zones around abortion clinics. Unfortunately, the court got the balance wrong when it voted Thursday to strike down the law.

As important as the First Amendment is, courts have long recognized that it may be restricted, within limits. Americans may protest, plead, hector and even offend, but they have no inalienable right to falsely shout “fire” in a crowded theater, play obscene movies on Main Street or intimidate or bully others going about their lawful business.

The Massachusetts buffer zones were established by the state Legislature after years of violence and intimidation by abortion opponents outside clinics. The fatal shooting of two clinic workers in Brookline, Mass., in 1994 by an abortion opponent spurred the original 2000 buffer zone law, which was eventually found by Massachusetts officials to be inadequate to the task of stopping opponents from intimidating clinic visitors – which is why they put a stricter law in place in 2007.

Read the whole story

Lawyer: Ex-CalPERS CEO to plead guilty

By Dale Kasler, Sacramento Bee

SAN FRANCISCO – The former chief executive of CalPERS is about to plead guilty to a conspiracy charge in connection with the bribery scandal that erupted at the nation’s largest public pension fund five years ago.

Fred Buenrostro, who ran CalPERS from 2002 to 2008, will enter a guilty plea next week. The dramatic twist was revealed Monday by his lawyer, William Portanova, during what was scheduled as a routine pretrial hearing in U.S. District Court.

Portanova said Buenrostro will cooperate with the government's prosecution of his old friend and mentor, Stateline businessman Alfred Villalobos, and "fully lay out the full story between the two of them." The two men stood about 10 feet apart during the court hearing and didn't appear to acknowledge each other.

Until Monday, Buenrostro, 64, insisted he'd done nothing wrong. He had no comment, during the hearing or afterward.

The criminal case against Buenrostro and Villalobos resulted from the biggest scandal in the history of the California Public Employees' Retirement System. The indictment focuses on a fairly narrow allegation: that the two men created fake letters on CalPERS stationery in order to ensure Villalobos was paid millions in fees for his work on behalf of a Wall Street investment firm.

Read the whole story

Truckee plans full day of July 4 events

Truckee's Fourth of July fun includes a morning parade, evening music and nighttime fireworks.

The annual Firecracker Mile leads the festivities with a one mile race along the parade route down Donner Pass Road from US Bank to the Train Station.

The parade, which starts at 10am, offers up close views of the legendary Wells Fargo horse-drawn stagecoach, and the famous Truckee River Precision Drill Team. Several of the nation's top Olympic athletes, including Julia Mancuso, Tamara McKinney and Travis Ganong, will be riding on the floats.

Fireworks start at dark over Donner Lake. If you don't have a ticket, find an open dock, or glide your kayak or canoe (carefully!) onto Donner Lake, park yourself and wait for the lightshow.

Click here for info about events in Truckee on Friday.

Opinion: Rules are necessary – even at parks

By Brian Uhler

June marked the beginning of summer, and with it the arrival of visitors and the summer concert series known as Live at Lakeview.

As a community and specifically as a police department we recognize the value of helping our visitors have a nice time in our beautiful town. The Live at Lakeview event is enjoyed by visitors and locals alike.



Brian Uhler

For the last two years, our officers have had a rather low-key approach to the summer series, not wanting to impact the fun and doing our best to gain voluntary compliance to the rules at the Lakeview Commons and other city parks. In previous years, those who visited Live at Lakeview didn't necessarily respond to the low-key approach, which not only included cops in "friendly, non-enforcement, reminder mode," but also announcements by organizers on the speaker system.

The rules that are most applicable are:

- No drinking alcohol in public (SLTCC 18-9)
- No smoking (SLTCC 18-81)
- No dogs (SLTCC 18A-11).

We have heard a clear message from the community, City Council, and those who attend the event, "there's too much smoking and drinking" and by smoking, I mean smoking of all sorts. To a lesser degree, people have complained of the dogs, too.

These laws are in place to make our city's parks inviting and friendly for all, but especially for kids and families.

Some have argued that public music events automatically mean that people are going to be smoking marijuana and drinking because that's just the way it is at a concert. To this, I want to point out some key differences:

Concerts are not "public" and are not usually free.

Concerts are attended by people who enter the event fully

understanding the type of crowd and likely behavior (not passers-by, families who happen to be at the public park, or parents with small children).

Concerts usually include a private security force.

In the first event of the year, we had five officers assigned. Twenty-four administrative citations were written. During the event, foul language was directed toward the officers; one person argued that the temporary, extra signs didn’t include the specific City Code sections (the permanent signs did have the sections); and another person indicated that since the sign said “please” it was viewed as being optional.

Your police department looks forward to keeping this event fun and friendly for all who attend throughout the rest of the summer.

Brian Uhler is the police chief for South Lake Tahoe.