Rhone wine event in El Dorado County

Five El Dorado County wineries in a region known for its handcrafted Rhone-style wines will celebrate local wine and food during the 10th annual Rocks & Rhones Festival on Memorial Day Weekend.

On May 25-26 Auriga Wine Cellars, Holly's Hill Vineyards, Miraflores Winery, Narrow Gate Vineyards and Sierra Vista Winery will pair locally sourced food including lamb, beef, honey and olive oil, with Rhone varietals like Syrah and Grenache. Vineyard hikes, barrel tasting and winemaker discussions will demonstrate the region's unique growing conditions and winemaking techniques.

The event is 11am-4pm each day.

Tickets are $35 each day and are available online or for $40 at the door.

For more info, call (530) 344-0227 or email info@pleasantvalleywineries.com.

S. Tahoe man credits CalStar with saving his life

By Mike Nichols

If anyone wants to know the benefit of the CalStar Membership Program, all they have to do is talk to longtime members Mike and Sally Neitling of South Lake Tahoe. Mike Neitling used

CalStar's services twice in 2012, perhaps saving his life, and his membership saved him from any out-of-pocket costs associated with the two flights.

Neitling, 61, was finishing up his vacation on Nov. 2, 2012, and wanted to complete some chores at his home before returning to work. One of those chores was to wash the outside windows of his house. Home alone at the time, he grabbed a ladder, along with some cleaning materials, and climbed up to the second floor of the three-story home. In an instant, the bottom of the ladder slipped and Neitling was abruptly heading for the cement driveway below.

"I didn't want to land on my head, so I sort of twisted around and I ended up landing on my backside," he said. "I knew I was in trouble because I was in excruciating pain and although I could move around a bit, I couldn't stand."



CalStar pilot Kris Hunt, from left, flight nurse Ted Langevin, Mike Neitling and flight nurse Stephen Poehls. Photo/Provided

Neitling yelled out, but no one could hear him. Finally after about 10 minutes, several public utility workers came to his aid. They quickly called 911 and within minutes a ground ambulance took Neitling to Barton Memorial Hospital. His physicians quickly diagnosed Neitling with a broken pelvis, and even worse he had severed an artery inside the pelvis and

he was bleeding heavily internally.

“My blood pressure dropped to 50 over 30,” he said. “I asked a physician if I was bleeding out, and he didn’t answer me. I think I already knew the answer.”

Neitling was given four pints of blood at Barton and a call was put into to CalStar 6 in South Lake Tahoe to transport him to Renown Medical Center in Reno.

The CalStar flight crew, including pilot Kris Hunt and flight nurses Ted Langevin and Stephen Poehls, arrived within minutes and loaded Neitling into the helicopter. During the flight to Renown, Langevin and Poehls gave Neitling an additional two pints of blood.

“The flight crew was terrific,” he said. “They kept me updated all the way to Renown. It was very clear to me that they were not only very caring people, but also people who truly knew what they were doing.”

Neitling reflects today that had it not been for CalStar, he may not have survived.

“If I would have had to be transported by ground ambulance, it would have taken about an hour and 15 or 20 minutes and I probably would not have made it.”

The CalStar flight from Barton to Renown took 20 minutes.

Once at Renown, Neitling was given two more pints of blood and physicians worked to fix the ruptured artery. They were successful in stopping the bleeding, and the next day Neitling was in surgery to have a metal plate inserted to secure his pelvis.

After recovering from surgery, Neitling spent a week at Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center for physical therapy.

“They predicted I would be in a wheelchair for about 45 days,

and they wanted to make sure I would be able to handle it. I was supposed to be at the center for two weeks, but I worked hard and was out in a week."

Neitling has now returned to work as a surveillance supervisor at Harrah's and Harveys Lake Tahoe.

"If it were not for CalStar, along with some excellent medical care, I probably wouldn't be here today," he said.

This was the second time in a year that Neitling was flown by CalStar. In July 2012 he was camping with friends and family on the North Shore of Lake Tahoe when his heart rate suddenly jumped to about 180 beats per minute. Because he had experienced previous heart issues, he was transported by ground ambulance to Barton Memorial Hospital, and subsequently taken by CalStar to Carson Tahoe Regional Medical Center for observation. He was subsequently released with no serious health ramifications.

Neitling and his wife, Sally, have lived in South Lake Tahoe for 40 years.

"About 10 years ago, we knew we wanted to become CalStar members," Neitling said. "I ski, I golf and I love the outdoors," he said. Among other things, he is a part-time ski instructor at Heavenly Mountain Resort. "The membership seemed to be an excellent investment."

Sally Neitling expressed her appreciation to CalStar as well. "Please know that we are so grateful for your skill and knowledge in saving [Mike]," she said. "I want to offer many thanks to all of you for the flight and for being here in Tahoe."

Mike Nichols is the director of Development and Outreach for CalStar.

Oak – a conundrum for wine aficionados

By Eric Pfanner, New York Times

AŸ, FRANCE – Want to start a fight at a wine tasting? Just mention “oak.”

Few issues get wine lovers as worked up as the question of whether to ferment or age wine in wooden barrels, usually made of oak. Doing so can help mellow the wine and add structure, richness and complexity. Done with a heavy hand, it can also smother the wine with the vanilla-like flavor of oak, obscuring its fruit, freshness and origins.

The use of oak increased in the 1980s and ’90s as winemakers around the world responded to consumer demand and critical acclaim for ripe, powerful reds and plump, buttery whites. Then came the backlash. Now things have swung so far that some self-consciously trendy wine drinkers recoil in mock horror at any hint of wood, extolling the virtues of wines made in vats of stainless steel or other neutral materials.

Dining at a fashionable organic restaurant in London not long ago, I overheard a woman at the neighboring table tell her partner, “Mmm, this is a good Chardonnay; it must have been unoaked” – as if that grape variety grew on trees, making oak removal one of the necessary stages in the production of a good Chardonnay.

But when it comes to oak, at least one wine region, Champagne, is – forgive me – going against the grain. And you will find no stronger champion of oak than Claude Giraud, who runs Champagne Henri Giraud, a medium-size, family-owned producer

in the grand cru village of Aÿ.

“There is no great wine without a great forest,” Giraud said during a recent tasting at his winery.

Until the 1950s, most Champagne underwent its primary fermentation, during which the sugar in the grapes is converted to alcohol, in oak. (A subsequent fermentation, in the bottle, produces the bubbles.)

In the postwar years, however, many producers discarded their barrels and shifted to stainless steel. Giraud argues that this was about cost and expediency rather than quality; at the time, demand for Champagne was growing rapidly and fermentation in stainless steel is cheaper and easier to control.

I’m not sure these were the only reasons. While most of the big brands rely heavily on stainless steel for their entry-level bubblies, some of the greatest Champagnes, including Dom Pérignon, never see any oak, either.

“I wouldn’t want to be dogmatic about it,” said Michael Edwards, a British writer who specializes in Champagne. “It’s also a question of taste.”

But he added: “It’s possible to make excellent Champagne without oak.”

A few well-known Champagne producers, including Bollinger and Krug, stuck with wood over the years. More recently, small producers like Jacques Selosse have attracted a cult following with oak-fermented Champagnes.

But Giraud is dismayed that even the oak enthusiasts in Champagne mostly buy their barrels from Bordeaux or Burgundy, using wood from forests like the Tronçais, in central France, even though Champagne has a forest on its doorstep: the Argonne.

The cooperage business in the Argonne Forest survived the heavy fighting of World War I, when an Allied offensive pushed through the area in 1918, leaving tens of thousands of casualties, as well as shrapnel that still scars many of the trees. Up until the 1950s, Giraud said, there were close to 200 coopers in the Argonne, supplying many of the Champagne houses. But now, Henri Giraud says it is the only Champagne producer that is still using wood from the forest.

Giraud has mounted a campaign to try to persuade his fellow producers to follow him back to the Argonne. He recently set up a partnership with the French National Forestry Office to manage the forest, and renamed his top Champagne cuvée Argonne in an effort to bring more attention to his cause.

“For a few years, Champagne has been reorienting itself toward quality, and oak barrels are back,” he said. “If Champagne really wants to return to its roots, it needs to come back to its forest, the Argonne.”

This is not about Champagne chauvinism, Giraud insisted. The oak of the Argonne is especially suited to making the local bubbly. Its tight grain has a more subtle influence on the wine than looser-grained oak, adding elegance and refinement rather than obvious oaky flavors.

Giraud has even identified distinct characteristics in the oak from different parts of the Argonne – caused, he said, by variations in the composition of the soil and the exposition.

Winemaking in France has long been underpinned by the principle that differences in vineyard terroirs – that is, the geology and geography of individual plots of vines – are the key to the diversity and greatness of the country’s wines. Does terroir matter to oak barrels, too?

To make his case, Giraud produced samples of unfinished Champagnes that had completed their primary fermentation in oak from three parts of the Argonne Forest. The differences

were indeed striking, so much so that in one case a roomful of tasters, including me, misidentified one sample as having been made from Chardonnay, when it fact it consisted of Pinot Noir.

Whether the subtleties of oak terroir are discernible in a finished Champagne is debatable. Most Champagne is a blend of wine from different vineyards and, often, from several vintages, so I'm not convinced that these nuances survive. Using different kinds of oak does give blenders a bigger palate with which to work, though.

There is also an element of transparency. Henri Giraud takes this to extremes, identifying every barrel in its cellar with a distinct code, specifying the origin of the wood.

Why does this matter? Camille Gauthier, one of the last representatives of an old craft called "merandier," which consists of selecting and preparing wood for barrel-making, said many French coopers use inferior oak from Eastern Europe, passing it off as top-quality French wood when they sell their barrels to winemakers.

"Traceability is just as important with oak as it is with horse meat," said Gauthier, referring to the recent scandal over the relabeling of horse as beef in European food products.

With oak, provenance is not the only variable. The size and age of the vessels also matter. Small barrels have a more pronounced oaky influence than large vats. Similarly, new wood leaves more traces behind than old oak – one reason many Champagne producers buy used barrels from Bordeaux or Burgundy.

Henri Giraud uses a fair amount of new oak for its top wines, including Argonne. The 2002 vintage of Argonne, the first to be released, certainly shows the influence of wood; it is a big, bold Champagne, with a deep golden color. It has a "winelike" quality, resembling white Burgundy in the richness,

persistence and silken layering of its flavors.

Like some other Champagnes that are fermented in oak, this is a robust wine. Rather than quaffing it as an aperitif, you'd be better off serving it at the table. I kept imagining it with monkfish, though I'm sure other seafood or light-colored meats would be good companions, too.

Oak-fermented Champagne may not be to everyone's liking. Because oak breathes more than steel, many of them have the signature nutty note of oxidation, which can be off-putting, especially if you expect Champagne to taste primarily of bubbles and sugar.

I happen to like these Champagnes, though I object to the pricing of some of them. Giraud's Argonne, for example, starts at around $223; for the price of a case, you could buy yourself a very nice oak table instead.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Tahoe Production House in South Lake Tahoe earned platinum and gold awards in the national 2013 Hermes Creative Awards competition for video excellence in the nonprofit category.

• Tahoe Mountain Brewing Co. in Tahoe City won a bronze medal for its Paddle Board Pale in the American Pale Ale category at the West Coast Brew Fest.

• Rodolfo Hernandez, Ruben Lizarraga and Sean Canilao – all

accused of killing Derek “Zippy” Penaranda a year ago at Mo’s Place in South Lake Tahoe – will be tried in Placerville. The case is not moving to Tahoe based on the local court calendar.

• Truckee is going out to bid on the $3.3 million Glenshire Drive Bike Lane Project.

• Mountain Yoga will take donations during Mother’s Day yoga from 4-5:15pm for the Zawadisha Fund.

DCSO keeps track of bad guys despite cutbacks

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Looking at the tools Douglas County sheriff’s officials have for dealing with bad guys, it’s a wonder anyone challenges them.

A .50-caliber rifle and machine gun are some of the weapons on the table in front of two members of the SWAT team. The crisis negotiation team has a high-tech van to operate out of. The boat patrol is ready for action on the lake. Search and rescue is talking about what it takes to find people.

The men and women and the tools they use in their jobs were incorporated into an open house May 8 outside the sheriff’s substation in Stateline.



Douglas County sheriff's Capt. Dave Aymami, left, and Sgt. Ron Elges talk about what the SWAT team does. Photos/Kathryn Reed

Kids were able to climb onto the motorcycle as if they were about to take off down Highway 50 to get the speeder. The bomb squad robot, which Tahoe Douglas fire brings out when DCSO needs it, is ready to spring into action.

The goal was to show the community the technology officers have at their disposal, build relationships and explain to residents how crime in the county is being handled. A similar event occurred in the valley last week. The plan is to do this at the lake about every three years.

Sheriff Ron Pierini has seen Douglas County, and Lake Tahoe in particular, change since he started with DCSO in 1976. He was a captain at the Tahoe substation until 1992, then undersheriff and now sheriff.

"The community has changed. Second homes have changed community involvement," Pierini told *Lake Tahoe News*.

In the last three years the sheriff's department's budget has been cut by $2 million and 10 positions have been eliminated.

Still, the department's arrest to prosecution rate is 38 percent. Nationwide that average is 22 percent.

Sgt. Ron Elges with the SWAT team said his unit has not been responding to as many calls in the last few years because of the shrinking population.

The three main reasons the SWAT guys are called are for high-risk search warrants, barricaded subjects, and people who have taken off into the woods to avoid capture.

Those barricaded calls also will involve the crisis negotiating team.

“We give them better alternatives than what they’ve chosen,” Deputy Eric Schinzing explained. “Usually it’s domestic issues. Someone thinks about suicide and may have someone with them.”

Pierini said traffic is the No. 1 issue for deputies. He’d like more deputies on the street, but budget constraints prohibit that from happening.



“We couldn’t function at the level we do today without (volunteers).” – Sheriff Ron Pieirini

Deputies respond to about 40,000 calls a year. (There are about 50,000 residents in the county.) The 750-square-miles are divided into three areas – Lake Tahoe, Carson Valley and Topaz.

Pierini credits the nonprofit sheriff's association with keeping the department flush with the necessary tools. He said that group has spent about $600,000 in the last seven years on equipment.

A cadre of volunteers also helps the sheriff's department. Between search and rescue, boat patrol and citizens patrol about 300 people volunteer with DCSO.

"If you added up the hours the volunteers put in, it would be a huge amount of money to have to replace them with paid staff," Pierini said. He said some people put in 200 hours a year. "We couldn't function at the level we do today without them."

Debut of LTCC's latest literary journal

Lake Tahoe Community College Writers' Series is hosting a celebration for the publication of the college's literary journal "The Kokanee" on May 15 at 8pm at the college library.

The event will feature short readings from student and faculty authors. Authors reading from their work include Frank Riley, Cece Cummins, Harper Dial, Bonnie Turnbull, Marcela de Lira Astorga, Karen A. Terrey, Ryan Row, and Alec Holmes.

The event is free.

"The Kokanee" will be available for purchase.

Two students will also be recognized for their writing with awards. Holmes won the Kokanee Award for his essay "Daunted by Bathrooms" and Row received an honorable mention for his short

story “Johnny Copper Crime Stopper”.

The cover art of The Kokanee features artwork from Paula Chung. Her painting “Gregor and Friends” was the winner of the 2012 Kokanee Art Award.

For more information, contact Suzanne Roberts at robertss@ltcc.edu.

Editorial: Restore faith in license plate program

Publisher’s note: ***This editorial is from the April 21, 2013, Riverside Press Enterprise.***

California’s specialty license plates should not dangle a promise that government does not keep. Drivers buy the plates to support a variety of causes, but a new audit found slipshod oversight of the resulting income. The Legislature needs to ensure that state agencies handle the money properly, and use the funds as drivers expected.

The state auditor last week released a report on the state’s specialty license plates. California offers 11 types of specialized license plates for an extra charge, with the money going to a variety of programs. The most common is the personalized license plate, which supports environmental protection. But there are plates that support the arts, help provide scholarships, aid veterans and help restore Lake Tahoe, among other causes. The specialty plates have raised more than $200 million over the past two decades.

Auditors looked at just two of the specialty programs: the environmental funds from three types of special plates, plus money from a memorial license plate commemorating the Sept. 11 attacks. Legislators ordered the audit after a series of news stories last year reporting lax management of the money from the specialized plates.

The results only raise questions about the state's handling of the specialty plate programs. The audit discovered that the Department of Motor Vehicles undercharged drivers for some of the plates, and failed to collect some fees in other cases. Altogether, the auditor said the specialty plate funds missed out on $22.2 million over the past two fiscal years.

But the report also found that state agencies used the license plate money in ways that had little connection to the programs' stated purpose. The memorial license plate, for example, is supposed to provide funding to help fight terrorism. But the California Emergency Management Agency spent more than $98,000 of the money over the past three fiscal years on office furniture and supplies, travel expenses and other uses unrelated to stopping terrorism.

The auditor could not determine whether another $1.3 million in license plate money during that period went for the programs the special plates supposedly support. State agencies could not provide proper documentation that some expenses were legitimate uses of the antiterrorism and environmental funds. And no one knows how far the lax oversight extends, because the audit only studied two license plate funds.

Such careless handling of public money undermines trust in state government, and makes taxpayers skeptical when government asks for additional taxes and fees. Drivers who thought their special plates were aiding favored causes now cannot be sure – which only irritates people and discourages participation in those programs.

The audit recommends what should already be obvious: The DMV should improve collection of the specialty plate fees, and state agencies should ensure proper use of the money.

State agencies should not need reminders of such basic responsibilities. Repaying drivers' civic impulses with sloppiness is an insult, not acceptable practice.

Vegas man going to prison for defrauding S. Tahoe resident

By Cathy Locke, Sacramento Bee

A Las Vegas man is headed to prison after being sentenced in federal court in Sacramento for defrauding a South Lake Tahoe investor of $2.9 million.

U.S. District Judge Garland E. Burrell Jr. today sentenced Jed Baron, 55, to five years and three months in prison for wire fraud related to the investment scheme, according to a Department of Justice news release.

According to court documents, Baron made a series of false business proposals to a victim in the Lake Tahoe area, including investment in a venture to sell Irish seafood to restaurants in Las Vegas. Instead of using the victim's money for the intended purpose, Baron diverted the funds for personal use and to pay other investors from previous deals.

Baron forged a series of invoices and other documents to convince the victim that the investment was legitimate, authorities said. He also persuaded the victim to invest in other false ventures, including motion pictures and vehicles.

The victim did not know that Baron had a prior felony conviction for fraud, authorities said.

The case resulted from and investigation by the FBI.

Overhaul of wiretap law could target Internet users

By Charlie Savage, New York Times

WASHINGTON — The Obama administration, resolving years of internal debate, is on the verge of backing a Federal Bureau of Investigation plan for a sweeping overhaul of surveillance laws that would make it easier to wiretap people who communicate using the Internet rather than by traditional phone services, according to officials familiar with the deliberations.

The FBI director, Robert S. Mueller III, has argued that the bureau's ability to carry out court-approved eavesdropping on suspects is "going dark" as communications technology evolves, and since 2010 has pushed for a legal mandate requiring companies like Facebook and Google to build into their instant-messaging and other such systems a capacity to comply with wiretap orders. That proposal, however, bogged down amid concerns by other agencies, like the Commerce Department, about quashing Silicon Valley innovation.



The federal government wants wire tapping laws to encompass the Internet. Graphic/DigitalTrends

While the FBI's original proposal would have required Internet communications services to each build in a wiretapping capacity, the revised one, which must now be reviewed by the White House, focuses on fining companies that do not comply with wiretap orders. The difference, officials say, means that start-ups with a small number of users would have fewer worries about wiretapping issues unless the companies became popular enough to come to the Justice Department's attention.

Still, the plan is likely to set off a debate over the future of the Internet if the White House submits it to Congress, according to lawyers for technology companies and advocates of Internet privacy and freedom.

"I think the FBI's proposal would render Internet communications less secure and more vulnerable to hackers and identity thieves," said Gregory T. Nojeim of the Center for Democracy and Technology. "It would also mean that innovators who want to avoid new and expensive mandates will take their innovations abroad and develop them there, where there aren't the same mandates."

Andrew Weissmann, the general counsel of the FBI, said in a statement that the proposal was aimed only at preserving law enforcement officials' longstanding ability to investigate

suspected criminals, spies and terrorists subject to a court's permission.

"This doesn't create any new legal surveillance authority," he said. "This always requires a court order. None of the 'going dark' solutions would do anything except update the law given means of modern communications."

A central element of the FBI's 2010 proposal was to expand the Communications Assistance for Law Enforcement Act – a 1994 law that already requires phone and network carriers to build interception capabilities into their systems – so that it would also cover Internet-based services that allow people to converse. But the bureau has now largely moved away from that one-size-fits-all mandate.

Instead, the new proposal focuses on strengthening wiretap orders issued by judges. Currently, such orders instruct recipients to provide technical assistance to law enforcement agencies, leaving wiggle room for companies to say they tried but could not make the technology work. Under the new proposal, providers could be ordered to comply, and judges could impose fines if they did not. The shift in thinking toward the judicial fines was first reported by the Washington Post, and additional details were described to the New York Times by several officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity

Under the proposal, officials said, for a company to be eligible for the strictest deadlines and fines – starting at $25,000 a day – it must first have been put on notice that it needed surveillance capabilities, triggering a 30-day period to consult with the government on any technical problems.

Such notice could be the receipt of its first wiretap order or a warning from the attorney general that it might receive a surveillance request in the future, officials said, arguing that most small start-ups would never receive either.

Michael Sussmann, a former Justice Department lawyer who advises communications providers, said that aspect of the plan appeared to be modeled on a British law, the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act of 2000.

Foreign-based communications services that do business in the United States would be subject to the same procedures, and would be required to have a point of contact on domestic soil who could be served with a wiretap order, officials said.

Albert Gidari Jr., who represents technology companies on law enforcement matters, criticized that proposed procedure. He argued that if the United States started imposing fines on foreign Internet firms, it would encourage other countries, some of which may be looking for political dissidents, to penalize American companies if they refused to turn over users' information.

"We'll look a lot more like China than America after this," Gidari said.

The expanded fines would also apply to phone and network carriers, like Verizon and AT&T, which are separately subject to the 1994 wiretapping capacity law. The FBI has argued that such companies sometimes roll out system upgrades without making sure that their wiretap capabilities will keep working.

The 1994 law would be expanded to cover peer-to-peer voice-over-Internet protocol, or VoIP — calls between computers that do not connect to the regular phone network. Such services typically do not route data packets through any central hub, making them difficult to intercept.

The FBI has abandoned a component of its original proposal that would have required companies that facilitate the encryption of users' messages to always have a key to unscramble them if presented with a court order. Critics had charged that such a law would create back doors for hackers. The current proposal would allow services that fully encrypt

messages between users to keep operating, officials said.

In November 2010, Mueller toured Silicon Valley and briefed executives on the proposal as it then existed, urging them not to lobby against it, but the firms have adopted a cautious stance. In February 2011, the FBI's top lawyer at the time testified about the "going dark" problem at a House hearing, emphasizing that there was no administration proposal yet. Still, several top lawmakers at the hearing expressed skepticism, raising fears about innovation and security.

Tahoe businesses helping women in Kenya

Six South Shore businesses are donating a portion of their May sales to the Zawadisha Fund.

The 2nd annual She is Beautiful Lake Tahoe fundraiser is about locals honoring themselves and those they care about, while supporting Kenyan women and children as they learn life saving self-defense skills, health education and financial literacy by participating in innovative microlending and saving programs.

These businesses are supporting the Zawadisha Fund this month:

BioSpirit – Massage & More, (530) 541.5511

Bliss Skincare Studio – Facials & More, (530) 318.8854

DoTerra Essential Oils – "Medicine Cabinet Makeover" dinner on May 31 at 6pm. RSVP to jules@zawadisha.org. Suggested donation of $25 includes light dinner and product.

Elevate Wellness Center – Acupuncture, Bodywork, and Nutrition, (530) 541.9355

Gaialicious – Global Gifts, (530) 542.4244

Mountain Yoga – Flow Class on Mothers Day, 4-5:15pm. Taught by Laura DeFrietas. All levels welcome. Donation only.

The mission of the Zawadisha Fund is to empower, entrust, and expand opportunities for women.

For more information, go online or email: jen@zawadisha.org