Letter: Heavenly thanks community

To the community,

On behalf of Heavenly Mountain Resort, I want to thank the community for stepping up and helping with the U.S. Freestyle Championships and the High Roller Hold ‘Em last month.

Heavenly had a large number of volunteers help pull off these amazing events successfully.

First, the California Conservation Core members from both the Greenwood and Tahoe centers were instrumental in helping us do zero waste at the Freestyle Championships. Parents and participants from the Heavenly Ski Foundation were also a huge help, as well as Heavenly staff and numerous community members.

Without the support and resources from South Tahoe Refuse, Heavenly could not have made our resource conservation efforts a success. The best thing about our zero waste activities was the recycling donation and match from South Tahoe Refuse to two local youth charities, the Heavenly Ski Foundation and SOS Outreach. We want to continue to bring big-time events that we can all be proud of to South Shore, and volunteer participation is one of the deciding factors for event organizers.

So, thank you to each of you for helping us run an environmentally-friendly event and position Heavenly as a world-class venue.

Frank G. Papandrea, environmental manager Heavenly Mountain Resort

Seminar for people wanting to start a business

SCORE, the Service Corps of Retired Executives, and the Carson Valley Chamber of Commerce will offer a free seminar May 18 for people interested in starting a business.

Business Start Up Basics, covering personal goals and evaluating the idea, legal issues, marketing, financial planning, funding and more, will be from 9-11:30am at the Chamber of Commerce in the Carson Valley Museum at 1477 Highway 395 in Gardnerville.

Presenters will be SCORE counselors Jack Van Dien and Tom Jablonski.

The seminar is geared at those entrepreneurs who may be looking at a franchise opportunity or starting an independent business.

The seminar is free, but reservations are requested by calling (775) 782-8144.

Minn. uses dogs to sniff out zebra mussels

By Jim Adams, Minneapolis Star Tribune

A novel player will show up at the governor’s fishing opener

on Saturday in Park Rapids.

But it will be a work day for the new guy.

Brady, a brown Labrador, will be sniffing around boats and trailers, looking for uninvited guests – namely zebra mussels, which have been spreading across Minnesota lakes and rivers. Brady will be joined by his handler, Lt. Julie Siems, a water resource enforcement officer for the Department of Natural Resources.

Brady and two K-9 pals, Digger and Laina, will be deployed in the metro area and outstate for the opener, the first time the DNR has used dogs to detect the invasive species, said Travis Muyres, a DNR enforcement officer.



Lt. Julie Siems with the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources has her K-9, Brady, detect zebra mussels.
Photo/Joel Koyama/Star Tribune

Minnesota is the second state to use dogs for this purpose, said Muyres. The first was California, which Muyres visited in March to learn how to train the dogs.

The canines were certified this week for mussel detection, making them part of the DNR's effort to enforce laws banning

the transport of the mussels, milfoil and other invasive species between state waterways on boats and trailers, Muyres said.

Digger, a 3-year-old black Lab, displayed his new skills on Tuesday. He and DNR handler Lt. Harry Hanson co-produced a media demonstration at a boat trailer in a parking lot at Fort Snelling State Park. Zebra mussels had been hidden from the nosy dog in the right rear headlight.

As Hanson led Digger, pointing to parts of the boat and trailer, the Lab sniffed and moved on. But when Digger reached the hiding place, he promptly sat down and awaited his reward: a bright yellow ball that he gleefully chomped and slobbered on. “He loves the ball,” Hanson said.

Muyres trained the dogs for five weeks. For the first four, they learned to smell, locate and signal deer meat. In the last week, they learned to locate zebra mussels.

“We brought out the mussels and after four hides, they had it down,” Hanson said.

Brady was obtained for free and Digger for $300, both from animal rescue shelters, Muyres said. Laina, a Belgian Malinois, was purchased from a breeder for $2,500, funds donated by the North Country Bowhunters.

Muyres said the dogs will be trained this summer to detect weapons and ammunition and to track scents to find people, evidence or other objects. The DNR already had two sniffing dogs, one of which will retire soon, and has used canines to sniff out weapons and to track and find illegally taken game and fish since 1995, he said.

Muyres said Laina will be in the metro area for the fishing opener and Digger will be in Alexandria, Minn.

The dogs will help stop invasive aquatic species, but the main

responsibility still rests with boaters and fisherman, who must inspect their equipment, Muyres said.

“We have 120 inspectors, three dogs and 23 [hot water] decontamination units,” he said. “But with 10,000 lakes, we can’t do it all.”

Cycling camp a prelude to Death Ride

Riding 129 miles and climbing 15,000-plus feet all in one day demands a rigorous training schedule and Kirkwood’s annual Near Death Experience bike camp can give riders the inside edge they need to complete such a challenging task.

The annual Near Death Experience will take place at Kirkwood Mountain Resort from June 6-9.

The Near Death Experience is a training camp for riders preparing for the Death Ride, the 129-mile bike tour of the California Alps on July 13.

The camp is led by elite coach Robert Panzera from Cycling Camp San Diego. Each day consists of on-the-road coaching focused on climbing, descending, bike fit/position and instruction in pacing, breathing and focus. Also included are evening clinics and seminars, covering topics such as nutrition, altitude, performance drills, quick mechanical fixes, strength and conditioning and more.

Riders will also have a chance to experience all three mountain passes of the Death Ride tour, depending on ability and inclination.

To register for the camp click here.

State spending millions on El Dorado County projects

The state’s vast transportation system received a major infusion of cash Tuesday as the California Transportation Commission allocated $878 million in funding to 114 projects that will support job growth, alleviate traffic delays, and repair aging roads and bridges.

The allocations include $476 million from Proposition 1B, a 2006 voter-approved transportation bond. In total, nearly $15.5 billion in Proposition 1B funds have been put to work statewide.

El Dorado County funding includes:

The allocation of $1.3 million to install a pedestrian overcrossing in Placerville at Coloma Street and Smith Flat Road undercrossing. These projects will seismic retrofit two bridges to maintain structural integrity and reduce the risk to lives and properties during seismic events.

For the water quality project from Johnson Pass Road to Incline Road near South Lake Tahoe comes $6.6 million. The construction of water quality collection and treatment facilities will enhance streams, rivers, and Lake Tahoe.

To construct an 8-foot wide Class I bike bath in Placerville from Forni Road-Lower Main Street to Ray Lawyer Drive and within the former Southern Pacific Railroad right-of-way there is $25,000. This project will offer a viable transportation

alternative to bicycle commuters and recreations opportunity to pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians by providing a safe direct route between residence and major activity centers.

CalFire to staff Tahoe stations in June

With the drier than normal conditions, the Amador-El Dorado-Sacramento Unit of CalFire has geared up for fire season beginning with the staffing of four engines on April 29.

Four additional engines are to be staffed on May 13.

“Beginning June 1 we will have two CalFire engines staffed (in Lake Tahoe); one in South Lake Tahoe and one in Carnelian Bay,” Teri Mizuhara with CalFire told *Lake Tahoe News*.

This year’s early start to wildfire season is the result of the very dry conditions, a combination of a lack of rain and an earlier than normal heat wave.

Unit Chief Kelly Keenan said in a statement, “I am very confident that my personnel can handle this increased fire threat. We are prepared all year long for emergencies. We are also preparing for the increased wildland fire threat by training more firefighters and staffing additional fire equipment.”

CTC worker vying to win Australia park ranger job

By Ky Plaskon, Capitol Public Radio

A South Lake Tahoe woman has beaten out nearly 600,000 other contestants from around the world to become a finalist for a dream job.

Victoria Ortiz, who works for the California Tahoe Conservancy, makes her pitch for what some have called the best job in the world with a 30 second video of her adventures.



Victoria Ortiz

“She fords raging rivers, she summits epic peaks and she takes herself very seriously. She is Australia’s next park ranger,” stated Ortiz in a video.

Ortiz is competing for one of six positions as a park ranger at the Great Barrier Reef. The job description includes checking water temperatures, patrolling the beaches and talking to tourists all day.

“I will tell them how excited I am to be there and hopefully about all the interesting species that are really endemic to that area,” Ortiz said.

The job comes with $100,000 in salary and living expenses. Ortiz will learn if she won on May 15.

Push for college diversity starts early in Calif.

By Richard Perez-Pena, New York Times

ANAHEIM – As the Supreme Court weighs a case that could decide the future of affirmative action in college admissions, California offers one glimpse of a future without it.

California was one of the first states to abolish affirmative action, after voters approved Proposition 209 in 1996. Across the University of California system, Latinos fell to 12 percent of newly enrolled state residents in the mid-1990s from more than 15 percent, and blacks declined to 3 percent from 4 percent. At the most competitive campuses, at Berkeley and Los Angeles, the decline was much steeper.

Eventually, the numbers rebounded. Until last fall, 25 percent of new students were Latino, reflecting the booming Hispanic population, and 4 percent were black. A similar pattern of decline and recovery followed at other state universities that eliminated race as a factor in admissions.



UC Irvine spends $7 million a year on preparing poor and

minority high school students for college. Photo/David McNew/New York Times

If the Supreme Court justices, who are expected to rule in the coming weeks on a case involving the University of Texas at Austin, decide to curtail or abolish the use of race and ethnicity in college admissions nationwide, then the experience here and in other states that have outlawed affirmative action in college admissions decisions – including Florida, Michigan and Washington – could point to new ways for public universities to try to compose a racially and economically diverse student body.

Those states have tried a series of new approaches to choosing students, giving applicants a leg up for overcoming disadvantages like poverty, language barriers, low-performing schools and troubled neighborhoods. That process has drawn heavy scrutiny, but in California, it is only half of a two-pronged approach. Disadvantaged students in poor neighborhoods, like Erick Ramirez, a senior at Anaheim High School, are benefiting from the state university systems' growing efforts to cultivate applicants starting in middle school.

"We've worked very hard to widen the pipeline, and there is still an enormous need to do more," said Mark G. Yudof, president of the University of California system.

The results of California's efforts offer some measure of satisfaction to supporters and critics alike. Both sides hail the UC system's strides toward economic – and not just racial – diversity; opponents of affirmative action claim that as vindication of their argument that it primarily benefits middle-class minority members. Supporters of race-conscious admissions acknowledge that the system has reversed the initial decline in black and Hispanic enrollment, though they

say that is not enough. Whatever the merits of race-blind admissions, gifted poor and minority students are less likely than others to take the right classes to be eligible for college admission, to take the SAT or ACT, to get academic help when they need it, to fill out complex forms properly or to apply to competitive colleges.

So California's public universities, and some of their counterparts around the country, have embedded themselves deeply in disadvantaged communities, working with schools, students and parents to identify promising teenagers and get more of them into college.

It is not enough, university administrators say, to change the way they select students; they must also change the students themselves, and begin to do so long before the time arrives to fill out applications.

Erick Ramirez lives in a neighborhood here where most parents have low incomes and speak Spanish at home, and many have not finished high school. At his school, Anaheim High, only about one student in four has passed enough high-level courses to qualify for any of California's public universities. But Erick, the Mexican-born son of a construction worker and a school aide, received acceptance letters from several selective colleges and chose San Francisco State.

It is impossible to say whether Erick, 18, with good grades and above-average test scores, would have been accepted at the same colleges without his disadvantaged background. What is certain is that he had considerable help from an unexpected source. For three years, people who work for the nearby UC Irvine, have met regularly with him – on Saturdays, after school and over the summers – to help him choose courses, complete classwork, prepare for the SAT, visit college campuses, fill out applications and apply for scholarships.

"I think I would have ended up in college anyway, but it would

have been a lot more difficult," Erick said. "I wouldn't have done as well, and I wouldn't know about a lot of the possibilities."

The need for such intervention unites people like Yudof, who believes that race should be a factor in admissions, and Richard D. Kahlenberg, a senior fellow at the Century Foundation, a liberal-leaning research group, who is a prominent critic of race-based affirmative action.

"If you're serious about doing admissions based on disadvantage, it requires a lot of outreach," Kahlenberg said. "It's the right thing to do, but it isn't easy, and it isn't cheap."

UC Irvine alone spends more than $7 million a year on that outreach, with a few hundred people working on it — mostly part time, and not always for pay — and reaching into dozens of poor neighborhoods in its region, said Stephanie Reyes-Tuccio, director of the university's Center for Educational Partnerships.

Many of the programs predate Proposition 209, but in the years after the ban took effect the University of California system's spending on them jumped to $85 million from $18 million, before shrinking again in the last decade.

Campuses like Irvine have made up for some of that decline with federal and private grants, their own budgets and even donated services from test-preparation companies. A few years ago, Irvine began using its own undergraduates to work part time in low-performing schools.

At their height five years ago, Reyes-Tuccio said, Irvine's programs reached about 24,000 students, but budget retrenchment has cut that to about 10,000.

Each of the nine undergraduate campuses in the UC system makes similar efforts, in addition to programs run by the system's

headquarters at Berkeley, and the larger, less selective California State University System.

The universities have programs that advise parents, programs to steer successful community college students into the state's senior colleges, and programs for elementary and secondary school teachers, to improve their teaching and subject mastery. But the largest part of the outreach is aimed directly at students in low-performing middle and high schools — targeting gifted students like Erick Ramirez, as well as broader efforts for all those who might go to college.

On a recent afternoon at Anaheim High School, 25 laughing, texting seniors crowded into a computer lab to fill out the federal government's online financial aid form. These are students who guide their parents through the English-language bureaucracy, not the other way around, so they expect little help from home. None can go to college unless they complete this form, and not one was able to do it alone.

Most were tripped up by unfamiliar terms like "emancipated minor" and "legal guardianship." Many others stumbled on the tangled instructions to follow if their parents were not citizens or had not filed tax returns.

"You don't have a Social Security number?" one girl said to her father in Spanish on her cellphone. The girl, an American-born citizen, was stunned to learn that he was in the country illegally.

Of the seven adults in the room, just one is an employee of the high school; three work for University of California, Irvine, and three work for CSU Fullerton.

The universities are doing work that in more affluent communities is handled by parents and guidance counselors. But after years of budget cuts, the average counselor in a California public school sees 1,000 students, the highest figure in the country and double the national average. In a

few hundred schools around the state, the UC system even helps pay the salaries of counselors and other support staff who would otherwise be eliminated. It taps into computers at the state's lowest-performing high schools, where it can evaluate each transcript and alert school staff members and university outreach workers about students who are falling behind.

To qualify for the state universities, California students must earn at least Cs in higher-level courses – and many of those students are still rejected. Over the last three years, 59 percent of Asians who graduated from California high schools met the university requirements, 44 percent of whites, 28 percent of blacks and 27 percent of Latinos.

"The schools have a serious lack of resources, and the counselors can be swamped with disciplinary problems and just getting kids to graduation," said Reginald Hillmon, who manages the transcript evaluation system. Many students are unaware, he said, of "that gap between what it takes to graduate and what it takes to get into a university."

It is a barrier that Cristina Flores, an employee at the Irvine campus, meets regularly at Century High School in Santa Ana, where nearly half the students are not proficient in English and 80 percent are poor enough to qualify for free meals at school.

Asking a group of juniors recently about meeting the university standards, Flores got mostly blank stares. "You guys know this, right? Please? Hopefully?"

She meets some students with unrealistically high expectations of getting into a college, but far more often, she says, the problem is students' setting their sights too low. Studies show that high-achieving, low-income students are far less likely to apply to selective colleges than their better-off counterparts, because they do not know their options, or wrongly believe that better schools are beyond their reach.

“My high school counselor never said I should go to a four-year college,” Flores, 24, said. “When I expressed interest, they were surprised, and it was already too late because I didn’t have the right classes, so I started at community college. That’s what we want to avoid with these kids.”

Spending three days a week at Century, Flores, an Irvine graduate, helps students fill out applications, reminds them of deadlines, shows them how to get fees waived, points to Web sites listing scholarships and steers them around potential pitfalls.

“Do you have to baby-sit your brothers and sisters all the time, or cook for them, or go work with your parents?” Flores asked a group of students, about half of whom raised their hands. “My mom used to make me go with her to clean houses on the weekends. I hated it. That’s why I went to college.

“But that’s what you put on the part of the application that asks for activities and volunteering,” she said. “Because if you don’t tell them, they’ll think you didn’t do anything.”

Jasmin Rodriguez, 17, a senior at Century, met with Flores and her colleagues dozens of times over the last few years. She has good academic credentials and boundless energy – she created a club to help abandoned animals and revived a flagging hula dancing club.

University officials admit that it is hard to know how much difference these programs make. Most of the students they reach go on to some level of college, but those tend to be among the better students in their schools. In examining changes in UC enrollment, there is no way to tease out the effects of new admissions standards versus outreach to low-income students.

But to students like Jasmin, there is no doubt about the programs’ value.

“Without their guidance, I would have been so lost,” she said. “There’s so many little things you don’t know unless someone tells you.”

Jasmin will enroll at UCLA in the fall.

Ranger to give talk about Desolation Wilderness

Desolation Wilderness will be the topic Bill Finch’s talk next month.

The volunteer backcountry wilderness ranger for the U.S. Forest Service will show slides which he believes best exemplify the natural beauty found close to South Lake Tahoe.

The free talk is June 15 at 1:30pm at the South Lake Tahoe branch library.

Lecture focuses on hand-arm pain

Daniel T. Robertson, a surgeon with Tahoe Orthopedics & Sports Medicine, will give a lecture on the causes of hand and arm pain on May 22 from 6-7pm.

The talk will be at Sierra Nevada College, Room 139, Incline Village.

The lecture is free.

For more information, call (530) 543.5537.