Student art to be on display at LTCC

Each year at this time the Lake Tahoe Community College Art Department comes out of its studios and permeates the college with a cornucopia of visual delights. In other words, it is time for the Annual Student Art Exhibition.

The opening reception for this year's exhibition will be on May 19 from 2-5pm, with an awards ceremony starting at 3:30pm. There will be approximately 400 works of student art on display, ranging from digital art to printmaking and sculpture. All of the artwork displayed represents student production over the past year.

As usual, the range of technical, stylistic, and conceptual explorations is staggering. Much of the work reflects the Art Department curriculum, but also includes work created independently by our students.

The work submitted for this exhibition will be juried for special honors in 17 categories. A first, second, and third prize, as well as honorable mentions, will be awarded in each category. A "Best of Show" recognition will also be awarded for the one work of art that is most outstanding according to the juror's opinion.

Selecting this year's special honors will be guest juror, Katie Lewis.

Also included are various cash awards given for outstanding achievement. These awards are donated by local businesses that support our students' artistic endeavors.

There is also the People's Choice Award. There will be a ballot process provided for you to decide what works of art you feel deserve special recognition.

The exhibition will continue through June 22.

The college is located off Al Tahoe Boulevard at 1 College Drive, South Lake Tahoe. This exhibition is free and open to the public during regular college business hours.

For more information, call (530) 541.4660, ext. 335.

Winter sports thaws tensions between U.S., Russia

By Kelly Whiteside, USA Today

Political relations between the U.S. and Russia have been especially icy this year, but eight months before the start of the Sochi Olympics, the relationship between the countries' skiing federations continues to be warm.

"We'll see how it plays out in Sochi itself, but the U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association has created a great relationship with the Russian skiing federation, where there's exchanges. They come over here for early snow and our athletes spent extra time on the hill in Russia," U.S. Olympic Committee sport performance team leader Kelly Skinner said Tuesday.

Away from the slopes, there's been considerable tension. After the U.S. took steps to punish Russians accused of human rights violations, Russia passed legislation barring Americans from adopting Russian children and recently released its own list of Americans banned from traveling to its country.



Ted Ligety

Even though a bit of schussing diplomacy isn't expected to smooth out these political moguls, the partnership will likely benefit both teams at the Olympics next February. Russia gained insight into the factors behind the United States' success by training with the Americans at Copper Mountain in Colorado and in New Zealand. In exchange, Russia gave the Americans special access to the Olympic venue.

After the world championships where he won three gold medals, U.S. skier Ted Ligety spent five days in Sochi testing out the venue. "That's a huge opportunity," Ligety told USA Today Sports on Tuesday. "They are not a huge Alpine nation at this point (two Russian men earned World Cup points this season compared to 14 American men) but they've become a lot better the last couple of years as they've put more money and attention to it."

With just one winter world championship remaining, men's hockey which begins Friday, the U.S. has reason to brag. The Americans won 34 medals at world championship competitions, including 14 golds.

The season before the 2010 Vancouver Games, the U.S. won 28 medals at world championships, including 13 golds. In Vancouver, the U.S. won a whopping 37 medals. It was the first time the Americans won the overall medal count in the Winter Games since 1932 in Lake Placid.

It will be difficult for the U.S. to match its record medal haul since Russia won't offer the same comforts of home, in

language and culture, as Vancouver did. But the ski team's extra time at the Krasnaya Polyana mountain venue and other test events at Olympic venues can help. Mikaela Shiffrin, the world champion who also won the overall World Cup season title in slalom, trained on the Olympic venue along with slalom specialists Resi Stiegler and David Chodounsky.

Ski jumper Sarah Hendrickson won her first World Cup of the season in December in Sochi. "That gives me a lot of confidence going into the Olympic year and getting a feel of what the conditions are like and how that hill is different from others," said Hendrickson, who won gold at the world championships. "I'm definitely keeping that in the back of my head."

Other standout U.S. performances this season: In addition to Ligety and Shiffrin, Lindsey Vonn also won a World Cup title while the Alpine team produced 33 World Cup top-three results from 10 different athletes, including 18 golds. Success on the slopes also led to prominent sponsorship opportunities, with Ligety and Hendrickson becoming the latest winter athletes signed by Kellogg's.

Hannah Kearney won the overall World Cup moguls title. Cross country skier Kikkan Randall won the World Cup sprint title.

Biathlete Tim Burke ended the USA's 26-year medal drought with a world championship silver. Ice dancers Meryl Davis and Charlie White won their second world title. The women's ice hockey team won gold after beating Canada. As the short track speedskaters struggled, Heather Richardson claimed the overall World Cup title in long track.

USFS, states fighting over millions of dollars

By Richard Lardner, AP

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Forest Service is in the business of preventing fires, not starting them.

Yet the agency set off alarms in Congress and state capitols across the West by citing the automatic spending cuts as the basis for demanding that dozens of states return $17.9 million in federal subsidies. And it's all come down to a bureaucratic squabble over whether the money is subject to so-called sequestration because of the year it was paid — 2013 — as the Obama administration contends, or exempt from the cuts because of the year it was generated — 2012 — as the states insist.

Right now, it's a standoff heightened by history and hard fiscal realities. But with taxpayer cash scarce, both sides are digging in: The Forest Service has to slash 5 percent of its budget under sequestration. The states, meanwhile, have depended for decades on a share of revenue from timber cut on federal land. Perhaps least willing to compromise are members of Congress who are up for re-election next year and are loath to let go of money that benefits potential voters back home.



U.S. Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell wants states to

return federal subsidies.

It’s not clear who gets to decide or whether the question ends up in court. But lines have been drawn.

“We regret having to take this action, but we have no alternative under sequestration,” Forest Service Chief Tom Tidwell wrote in March to governors in 41 states, explaining that since the payments were issued in the 2013 budget year, the money would be subject to sequestration.

Infuriated, Republicans and Democrats from Capitol Hill to the governor’s offices banded together to fight back, arguing the money was paid to the states well before the spending reductions went into effect. The governors of Alaska and Wyoming have flat out refused to send the money back.

“The frustration level is off the charts on this,” said Sen. Ron Wyden, D-Ore., whose timber-rich state is the top recipient of the Forest Service payments and stands to lose nearly $3.6 million.

Wyden, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, said he and Alaska Sen. Lisa Murkowski, the panel’s top Republican, are working together to “turn this around” so their states and others are not forced to return any money to the federal government.

“This is slap-your-forehead-in-disbelief kind of stuff,” Wyden said.

At issue are so-called county payments, a revenue sharing plan that’s existed since President Teddy Roosevelt created the national forests to protect timber reserves from the cut-and-run logging going on at the time. For nearly a century, hundreds of counties received a quarter of the revenue from the timber sold on federal land. The money is being used for roads, schools and emergency services and is a welcome addition to cash-strapped county coffers, especially in the

Northwest. In recent years, the law has acted as a subsidy for states and counties hard hit by logging declines triggered by measures to protect threatened species.

Idaho's Valley County, for example, would have to return more than $128,000 from its budget of $2.5 million for roads and schools. That leaves Gordon Cruickshank, chairman of the Valley County commission, in a no-win position. Should he forgo the repaving of even a single mile of the county's 300 miles of paved roads, defer maintenance on a bridge or lay off two county employees?

"We are struggling really hard now to figure out what to do," Cruickshank said. "It's a tough pill to swallow that they sent these payments out just a few months before sequestration, and now they want them back."

The Forest Service has paid billions of dollars to counties over the decades, but the receipts dwindled as logging on national forests dropped precipitously in the 1990s – first in the Northwest to protect the northern spotted owl and salmon, and then later across the country as concerns grew over the impact of clear-cut logging on wildlife and clean water.

In 2000, Wyden led the charge for a new law, called the Secure Rural Schools Act, a way for the government to pay counties that no longer could depend on revenue from logging in federal forests. But the law has expired, and the last payments went out in January. Wyden and other lawmakers are pushing to renew the subsidy.

The Forest Service issue provides one look at the real-world fallout of sequestration, which began March 1 after Congress and President Obama failed to agree on a deficit-cutting plan. Forced to find the required savings in the wobbly aftermath of recession, federal officials are getting creative – reducing hours at courthouses, furloughing employees and cutting back services. The full impact of sequestration remains unclear

because most of the reductions have yet to take effect.

Ryan Yates of the National Association of Counties said state and local officials understand that sequestration is the law of the land and that future cuts to scores of federal programs are inevitable. But there is widespread concern that the Forest Service's action means that the sequestration's reach is far greater than they anticipated.

"This retroactive move by the administration to squeeze more money from rural forest communities is not only legally questionable, but insults the longstanding relationship between counties and the federal government," Yates said.

Tidwell's March letters to the governors incited lawmakers and state officials, who said the payments came from revenues generated in the 2012 budget year and were therefore not subject to sequestration.

The National Governors' Association advised governors to consult closely with their legal staffs before making a decision.

"No one has ever heard of an agency demanding money back that they have already spent," said NGA Deputy Director Barry Anderson.

In a letter sent to senior Obama administration officials in late March, four House Democrats joined 27 House Republicans in assailing the Forest Service's demand, calling it an "obvious attempt by President Obama's administration to make the sequester cuts as painful as possible." The Forest Service was aware for months that sequestration was a possibility, they said. Yet even after it went into effect, the agency waited for several weeks before informing states that payments would have to be returned.

"We request that this action be halted," the House members wrote.

Caltrans to start Hwy. 50 work in S. Tahoe

Caltrans on May 6 will begin work on Highway 50 from Ski Run Boulevard to Wildwood Avenue.

Construction through June 30 will occur primarily from 6am-6pm Monday through Thursday and Friday from 4am-noon.

Beginning July 1, night work is expected from 8pm-11am Monday through Friday.

Motorists, bicyclists and pedestrians are asked to be patient and allow some extra time to get through the work zone.

Letter: Politics and TRPA

To the community,

Who will slay the TRPA? Will it be Nevada or California that kills the beast? The soap opera has public officials in both states playing musical chairs. Some who wanted the TRPA dead now wish it to live because the big bad bear California is threatening to create a California agency for its part of Lake Tahoe if Nevada pulls out of the TRPA.

South Lake Tahoe’s City Council is an example. Mayor Tom Davis who has opposed the TRPA now wants it to live. Mayor Davis has said that a California agency would not be in the best interest of local government. But that’s the tough nut to

crack. What’s in the best interest? How do we define those words when South Tahoe is a battleground where factions fight for their interests to prevail? Those who want the loop road are sure that they know what is best. Those who promoted the convention center knew what was best. So on and on goes the local soap opera. Where it stops, who knows? Who will get what, when will they get it, and how will they get it?



Bill Crawford

In the scheme of things political, each man and woman has the vote so that they can vote for what they see as their best interest.

Political parties are factions that compete to govern. And each party knows what is best. But it’s a messy business. People and parties are divided on big issues. Taxes, war, peace, etc. People in government who claim to have a vision are too cocksure that they are right. I am thinking of Iraq. Too often they are dangerous visionaries. And too often they are elected to the City Council where they leave a record of failure.

Bill Crawford, South Lake Tahoe

Incline project could boost cell service

AT&T wants to install overhead fiber optic lines on existing poles near Diamond Peak Ski Resort in Incline Village.

The idea is that people would have better cell phone and Internet service.

The U.S. Forest Service, as landowners, will decide if the project goes forward.

No land has to be disturbed in the 10,740-square-foot area where the 1,074-feet of line would go.

Public comment is being taken through May.

For more info, call (530) 543.2774 or email kkuentz@fs.fed.us.

U.N. seeks protection of journalists

By Australia Network News

On World Press Freedom Day, U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon says press freedom “does not happen automatically,” but requires the creation of a safe environment for dialogue, where journalists can do their jobs without fear of reprisal.

“Every day, freedom of expression faces new threats. Because they help ensure transparency and accountability in public

affairs, journalists are frequent targets of violence," Ban said in a joint statement with Irina Bokova, director-general of the U.N. Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).



The camera of an injured photographer is covered with blood in 2003. Photo/AFP/Getty Images

They say action must encompass both traditional media as well as digital mediums.

"Bloggers, citizen reporters and social media producers, as well as their sources, face increasing threats to their safety," they said.

According to UNESCO, more than 600 journalists have been killed in the past ten years, many while reporting in non-conflict situations.

Impunity is also widespread as nine out of 10 cases of killings of journalists go unpunished.

In addition to physical dangers, journalists are being targeted with psychological and emotional violence through cyber-attacks, data breaches, intimidation, undue surveillance and invasions of privacy.

World Press Freedom Day is observed each year on May 3.

Pacific media leaders have used World Press Freedom Day to call for greater media self-regulation in the region.

Solomon Islands has hosted an event to mark the day, attended by a core group of media managers from around the region who are working towards a standards process.

A key part of this concept is a regional Pacific media ombudsman, who would implement policies to make newsrooms more accountable and help media outlets handle complaints better.

Jason Brown, coordinator at the Pacific Freedom Forum, has been helping to draft the ombudsman plan.

He has told Radio Australia's Pacific Beat that media organizations' limited resources often mean there is no one to monitor regional media or oversee a complaints process.

"We're meant to be the Fourth Estate, but our funding levels are more like the 40th Estate," he said.

"So mistakes do happen, and the idea of the ombudsman is that if concerns can not be resolved locally – either through the media organization itself or any existing mechanisms in country.

"Then there's a regional body that complainants, or indeed the media itself, can kick an issue upwards and get input from around the region and from the ombudsman's office."

Tax revenue creates surplus

for California

By Chris Megerian, Los Angeles Times

SACRAMENTO — California has been flooded with revenue this tax season and is on track to finish the fiscal year with a surplus of billions of dollars, according to officials.

State coffers contain about $4.5 billion more than expected in personal income tax payments. Nearly $2.8 billion of it arrived April 17, the third-highest single-day collection in California history, according to government figures.

Business taxes have also rebounded and are likely to be $200 million ahead of projections.

Gov. Jerry Brown will reveal his latest spending plans this month. State law may require much of the surplus to go to schools and community colleges.

After years of budget cuts, and after voters approved Brown's tax hike in November, the pressure on the governor will be intense from lawmakers and advocates eager to restore money to programs that were sliced to close deficits. But Brown has already cautioned that there may not be much cash to spread around after education funding requirements are met.

"Depending upon how the money flows, it may not be as available as many people are now thinking," he said recently.

Brown, whose administration has projected that tax revenue will rise for the next four years, has also said he wants to use the opportunity to pay billions of dollars in debt. The tab for various borrowings during years of budget crisis is expected to be almost $28 billion by the end of June, according to state officials, and will take years to erase.

California relies heavily on income taxes to pay state bills. Last year, April taxes fell far short of expectations,

widening the budget deficit. The new figures show a dramatic change in Sacramento's fortunes.

Assembly Budget Chairman Bob Blumenfield, D-Woodland Hills, said he's thrilled.

"We're not framing the debate around what to cut," he said. "We're making choices about what kind of investments we want to make."

The tax surplus is partly a sign that California's economy is on the mend, with housing prices on the rise and unemployment dropping. The stock market has also been climbing, pumping more money into the state treasury.

"It's almost certain that 2013 will be a very good year," said Steve Levy, director of the Center for Continuing Study of the California Economy in Palo Alto.

Brown's plan for raising taxes temporarily was intended as a "holding action" to keep state books balanced while the economy rebounds, Levy said. A strong recovery could help vindicate that approach. Brown's measure added a quarter-cent to the state sales tax for four years and increased income taxes on high earners for seven.

Meanwhile, lawmakers, state officials and financial experts have cautioned that the spike in revenue may not hold.

It's possible that Californians, fearing federal income tax hikes stemming from the budget standoff in Washington, cashed out investments late last year. Jerry Nickelsburg, senior economist at the UCLA Anderson School of Management, said federal statistics suggest many people did so.

"If you had a choice of taking income in January or December, and you will pay less taxes in December, why wouldn't you do that?" he said.

That could account for some of the current surplus – and state

income could fail to keep pace in the next fiscal year, which begins July 1.

Chris Thornberg, a founding partner at Beacon Economics in Los Angeles, said he is concerned that lawmakers will use the spike in revenue as an excuse to abandon efforts to rein in public-worker benefits or stabilize the state's tax system. California's reliance on income taxes makes its finances somewhat unpredictable and has led to cycles of boom-and-bust budgeting.

"Maybe they will shock me and do the right thing," he said. "But I'm not holding my breath."

Crop insurance becomes big subsidy for farmers

By Dan Charles, NPR

Say the words "crop insurance," and most people start to yawn. For years, few non-farmers knew much about these government-subsidized insurance policies, and even fewer found any fault with them. After all, who could criticize a safety net for farmers that saves them from getting wiped out by floods or drought?

But consider this: According to a news analysis, crop insurance allowed corn and soybean farmers not only to survive last year's epic drought, it allowed them to make bigger profits than they would have in a normal year. A big chunk of those profits were provided through taxpayer subsidies. In fact, crop insurance has grown into the largest subsidy that the government provides to America's farmers.



Taxpayers foot bill of farm insurance. Photo/NPR

Economist Bruce Babcock, from Iowa State University, carried out the new analysis. It was commissioned by the Environmental Working Group, a long-time critic of agricultural subsidies.

“We really saw, in 2012, how the crop insurance program performs,” says Babcock. “It kind of reveals itself.”

What’s revealed, first of all, is the fact that the vast majority of farmers are signing up for a version of insurance that Babcock calls the “Cadillac.” This kind of policy covers two different kinds of losses: Lower harvests, or lower prices.

Here’s why it’s Cadillac insurance, and why it ends up costing taxpayers billions of dollars. Last year, farmers got a poor harvest. At the same time, because corn and soybeans were in short supply, prices soared, which benefited farmers greatly. The insurance, however, paid farmers for the lost yield – but paid them at the higher, post-drought market price. Essentially, farmers reaped the drought’s benefits, yet were protected form its harm.

“Those farmers made more money than they anticipated making when they planted the crop. That’s clear,” says Babcock.

In all, payouts added up to $16 billion last year, a new record, most of which was paid by taxpayers. According to Babcock, if farmers had instead signed up for another kind of

crop insurance, which simply pays a farmer for revenue that's lost because of crop failure, payouts would have come to just $6 billion.

According to Babcock, the government should limit its subsidies to this simpler, "plain-Jane" insurance policy, which is a perfectly adequate safety net for farmers. Under the current system, he says, government subsidies make "Cadillac" insurance artificially cheap, dramatically driving up the cost of the program. (On average, the premiums that farmers pay cover only about 40 percent of the cost of crop insurance.) "It just seems to me that a lot of money could be saved," he says.

Congress is once again starting work on a new version of the Farm Bill, which sets the rules for crop insurance. It tried to pass a new bill last year, but failed.

Snippets about Lake Tahoe

• Are you a paid subscriber to *Lake Tahoe News*? Here is a paid subscriber form.

• The National Ski Areas Association named Kirkwood as having the Best Avalanche Safety Program, Sugar Bowl the Best Chairlift Safety Program and Mammoth the Best Safety Week Program.

• North Lake Tahoe has an ad in Southwest Airline's *Spirit* magazine touting golf, with a picture of people playing a round and Lake Tahoe in the distance. The headline – The hard part is keeping your eye on the ball – as they shoot toward

the lake.

• Community Cleanup Day is June 1. Clean Tahoe will help senior citizens and disabled by picking up items. Call in the next two weeks to get on the schedule – (530) 544.4210.

• The U.S. Ski and Snowboard Association has named Squaw Valley Ski Team the 2013 USSA Alpine Ski Club of the Year.